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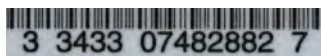
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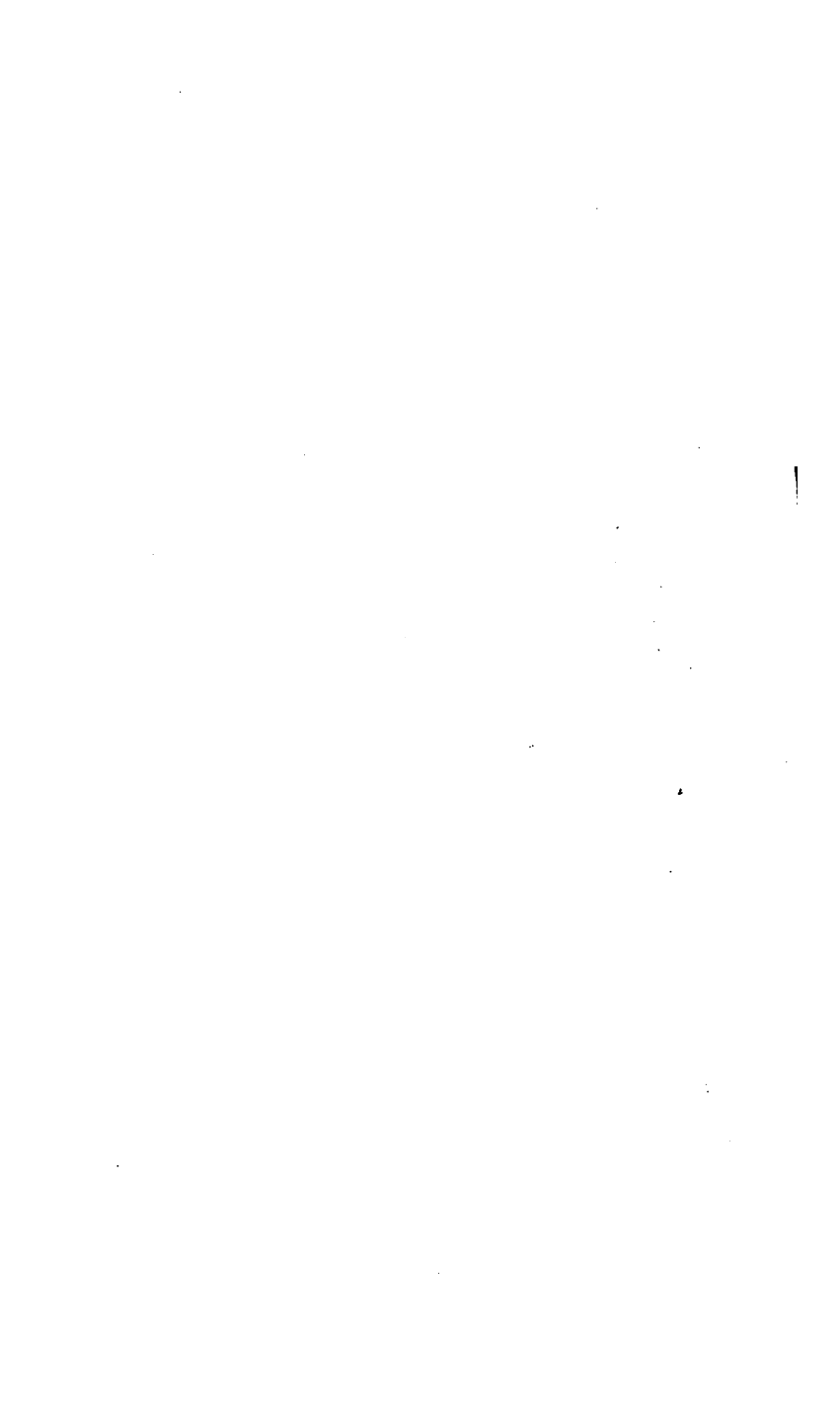














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# BUNCH-GRASS STORIES

By

MRS. LINDON W. BATES

*(Yorkshire White Hairs)*  
AUTHOR OF

"A BLIND LEAD" "A NAMELESS WRESTLER"

"ARMAIS AND OTHERS"

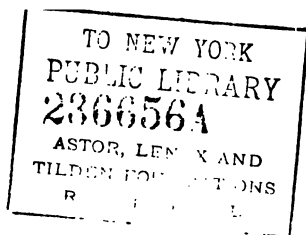


PHILADELPHIA

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1895

*Chas. F.*



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## Preface.

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IT was the author's privilege to spend several years in the far West. While too late for contact with the dramatic days of the Argonauts, she was yet early enough to encounter in the by-ways the frontier quality which made the unique charm of the Slope. Successive waves of immigration had brought in elements the most diverse, and the old order was all but submerged. The resultant life was full of zest. Its situations had an intensity and its action a directness which gave them a peculiar interest.

In the splendid empire of the coming West little will remain to keep the memory of its beginnings. These stories, woven out of incidents of its later settlement, seek to embody the spirit of the transition time.

Into the collection have been put "Inspiration at the Cross-roads" and "The Black Shell," tales of other days and other wheres. The rest of the volume is so uncompromisingly modern that the writer has felt warranted in inserting two stories for those who, like herself, still love the old.

J. B.



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## Resurrection on the Umpqua.

### I.

JOHN ROWE's place had become to the settlement general store, post-office, lodging-house, and city hall. It was the first of erection, and therefore the first available for the communal needs of the squatters.

They had met to-day on important civic duty, and were grouped about, some standing, some sitting upon seats of appropriated barrel-tops.

"You citizens have got to stop flying off the question," one was saying. As he occupied a stool with four legs he had been made chairman, though there was no formality and but little order in the proceedings. "You've just got to get down to bus'ness," he insisted. "Here's Abe Emerson shifted onto fences, and Ives discussing a chimbly; and the meetin' 'll break up like the three others without settling about what this here town'll be named."

Abe Emerson, thus called to order, returned to the business of the day.

"I'm standing by the name the Indians gave the river. Umpqua's good enough for me."

But Ives protested vigorously.

"I don't want nothing Indian; I want the town named for whites, not for redskins. We're as good as savages, maybe, and as well able to name a place. 'Umpqua' may make sense to a Chinook, but I ain't



Chinook. Let's call it something that's got a meaning to ourselves."

"If you want something that's got a meaning to ourselves," said John Rowe, slowly, "you'd best call the town 'Judgmint.' There ain't a name as fits the conditions and hits every one of us like 'Judgmint.'"

It was a daring speech. Few would have had the courage to voice the truth which the settlement masked, even to itself. Rowe's irony was like a challenge. Two of those standing nearest leaped to their feet, but the assailant met their eyes straightly; there was no quailing about John Rowe, and the men weakened and dropped to their seats again. The first quick flash of resentment changed slowly on the squatters' faces to a subtle shame. The occupant of the chair turned; he smiled, and his smile was grimly frank, where frankness was almost wickedness.

"You're right, Rowe," he said. "There's no name'll gather in facts and fit me tighter'n that. I throw my vote for Judgmint."

The group looked uncertainly to the two. What treacherous influence was impelling these men, who maintained always the attitude of abused victims of ill fortune, to avow at last in this reckless abandon that in misfortune had been fault? The speech of the oldest was as a breach in the barrier of each mind's long reserve, and one after another, with a strained smile, half furtive, half desperate, stood in that strange confessional and spoke his condemnation in,—

"I throw my vote for Judgmint."

After each slow avowal there was a pause, in which all looked to the ever-lessening few, wondering where would pass the line that marked off those self-justified.

But through the group it passed, and each one stood at the bar, and each one spoke as had the others, "I throw my vote for Judgmint," till the last one stood alone, the youngest, the favorite, the man born crossing the plains. His voice had in it no harsh undertone, and his speech no burden of story.

"This place ain't Judgmint to me," he said, cheerily. "I've nothin' to git judgmint for. I've worked with one or other of you below in Californy ever since I could hold a pick. We've had hard luck in the gold-fields, and we've come up here to try a new deal. I didn't mind being broke particular. I got enough to eat, and I'd none but myself to trouble about. I'll get enough to eat here, and some good land threw in. We're getting back on our luck, and we'll pull out on the Umpqua. You folks can call it Judgmint if you like; to me it'll be Resurrection."

There was something about this one, who still had youth and was guiltless, that touched them vitally. He stood suddenly apart,—a being unlike them, embodying all that they had lost. His name, "Resurrection," was as a far, faint bugle-call to courage, to effort, to hopes that had long lain buried. But the force of years was upon them, and they might not lift it at will.

"It can be Res'rection to you," John Rowe observed, cynically. "You've got no kin. You never had no home. You don't know nothing but Californy."

"That's true," the youngest allowed; "I've got no past. It used to make me feel heavy sometimes, long ago, when I was a youngster, and you fellers used to talk about your famblies, and your old fathers and mothers. But you got out of the way of alluding to

'em after a while. I ain't heard one of you mention the States in—well, it's a powerful long spell."

John Rowe gave an impatient stamp of his foot.

"Would you have us chatterin' about 'em forever? There was nothin' more to say."

"Prob'ly not. I suppose latterly you took it out in thinkin'."

"A man's thoughts is his own private business," Rowe observed, curtly; "they don't concern outsiders."

The tone of the meeting had fallen into the minor. This was a subject not to be rashly intruded. The men seemed for the time indisposed to talk, but they smoked hard and stared at the floor, and one felt that their minds were busy though their thoughts were far away.

## II.

The settlement on the Umpqua was an offshoot from the great horde that had crossed the Rockies in the early days of California's mining excitement. They were not of the fortunates whom romance has immortalized; but of that larger majority left to their oblivion,—the men who did not "strike it rich" in the gold-fields.

Ramson, the youngest, knew little of those earliest days, for he was born and orphaned on the journey out. He grew naturally into the life surrounding him. He subsisted as did the rest of this unsuccessful column, but he had none of their impatience at defeat or their feverish greed for "luck." He dug and washed, but a possible fortune gave him little concern. When once his companions rallied him for his want of their common

fire he answered, and his reply was justification to them all,—

“You, pardners, are here to make a fortune and go back home. I’ve got no home to go to.”

So while the others worked and grew angry and defiant and at last despondent, this lad remained indifferent; not loudly happy, but not morose, indolent, shiftless, and contented.

Ramson was a type that, alas, they did not recognize,—the man with no ties and no duties. Later, when they had themselves cast off the links of their own connections, they knew at last that they had grown into his image of vagrancy, and that it was darkened in them by the cowardice of guilt.

It is hard to deal impartial justice to these stragglers of a defeated army. They had been at first full of the courage and good purpose of the hopeful, but persistent disappointment slowly froze their ardor and left them stolid. After the years of bootless effort they no longer saw visions or dreamed dreams. “The States,” that name which so long had held them by its necromancy, at whose memory yet again they had hurled defiance in the mocking face of failure, and turned to the treacherous siren song of hope,—“The States” had lost the magic from its spell. They would never go back, these exiles, for what could they carry with them as the fruitage of toil but premature age?

There is a relentless law in the universe by which whoso accepts failure accepts with it degeneracy. These outcasts of fortune grew blunted to their civilizing impulses. The indifference which was at first occasional, the product of depressed moods, became soon a fixed condition. They felt themselves the dross precipitated

from the social solution, and they came at the end to rather like their position. It was a comfortable one, surely ; the world made now no exactions ; it expected of them nothing,—they had the license and the liberty of those beyond the pale. And they sank by the weight of a growing inertia into the listless indigents which are ever the pariahs of a community.

The younger men now talked less and less of the sweethearts left behind, and the older ones ceased reckoning the heights of their growing broods. The name of home no longer made them sullen. They had grown past sullenness, and heard the word with the furtive smile of the foolish and self-deceived.

When the placer mines began to fail the first to feel the pressure was this impecunious sediment. It had lived on the rim of the possible ; the narrowing of margins crowded it over the edge. To exist now the river bottoms must be abandoned and another occupation chosen. The "rabble" of the gold-fields scattered, some working north, some south, all seeking conditions allied to their peculiar needs and temperaments.

This particular band followed the line of the Sacramento, and, crossing the ridge of the Siskiyou, dropped into Oregon. In the valley of the Umpqua they halted at last.

The fertile soil gave pledge of sustenance with slight exertion. They homesteaded each a quarter section, and put up a cabin of rough-hewn logs.

### III.

Mining has ever been subversive of the home ; agriculture, its foster-mother. In the old conditions woman was superfluous ; here she became a pressing necessity.

In farming there were no companionships. The men were isolated, save through the evenings, when, as now, they came together for very loneliness. Their desultory labor and their long intervals of rest both began to press upon them their forlornness, and to bring back meditations that they had long since ruthlessly banished.

Their speech was becoming more and more reminiscent. The banished word "home" was furtively recalled, and it was spoken now more in regret than in cynicism. There was beginning to be a something latent in the temper of the squatter that was ominous of revolt. The men were fitful in their impulses, irritable, often quarrelsome. The amiable content had passed from their natures, leaving a moodiness that verged on the lawless. And because, perhaps, of their growing alertness and the sensitiveness to one ever-vibrant chord, these fateful strings seemed to be smote upon at every turn. Even here, where they had assembled to settle that harmless subject of a name for the settlement, the purpose was forgotten, for the haunting spectre had stolen in and would not be exorcised.

Ramson's allusions to "famblies" and "fathers and mothers" had precipitated again this feverish silence that brooded as a herald of change. To-day in the name "Judgment" the discontent had found its first desperate voice. Now in the stillness forces were growing articulate. Ever and anon one drew his pipe from his mouth, and looked up as though about to venture a remark. But the knowledge of all as to what was the dominant thought of each was constraining, and the pipe was once more set between the teeth. Soon the silence became oppressive, and John Rowe rose to escape it. Usually he but half rose, lacking the enterprise

necessary to draw himself to his full stature, but to-night he moved with energy, as though he would project himself out of the miserable current of his reflections. He walked to the door with a stride that was new to the squatters. It startled them all from their musing, and brought them back violently to the subject for which they had assembled.

"Look a-here," the chairman called to the retiring figure, "you citizens can't disband till you've come to some agreement as to what we'll call this settlemint. We ain't going on no longer,—one man calling it Umpqua, and another Akin's Holler, and another Devil's Rest."

"We've called the place Judgmint," Rowe said, decisively, from his post against the door. "I ain't heard but one man say he was against the name, and——"

"But he's very much against it," the youngest broke in. "It's a bad name. It's like a curse, somehow, and people would avoid the place, thinking it unlucky. Now, Resurrection would draw settlers. The name would be a kind of good omen."

"It's a pleasant-soundin' name," one allowed.

"It's a kind of a woman's name," remarked another.

The group turned on the speaker with a ridicule that had a savage undertone.

"What do you know of a woman's name?" called Emerson, spitefully. "You ain't seen a woman since you crossed the mountains."

"Why would we call the town by a woman's name?" growled a second. "There ain't a woman in the settlement, nor ever will be."

The man attacked kicked over a can, but said nothing further.

Conversation was treacherous to-night ; every theme seemed to lead the community further and further into this fateful vortex. They continued mercilessly their onslaught upon the possible feminine quality in a name for the town, and their persistence of assault proved only how strongly this haunting force was moving them. While they wrangled, the youngest, Ramson, was lost in reflection. Finally, he broke in upon the assembly with a question that struck like a lightning flash out of a summer heaven.

"Why don't you fellows," he asked, hesitatingly, "you that ain't never going back to the States, bring your famblies out to Resurrection?"

The hardihood of the question left them at first overawed. Dimly, with blind groping, emotion had been reaching out after this thought that Ramson had bluntly voiced for them. Now that they stood face to face with the image of their inmost reflections, they were dumb, held by the sense of their own futile daring. No one answered, and again the youngest ventured :

"You fellows won't never go back to the States, and the Umpqua's a mighty taking climate. It's coming spring now ; why don't you fetch your famblies out to Resurrection?"

Then the oldest man of the group, the one that held the chair, broke into a laugh so hard, so pitilessly grim, "Why don't we bring 'em out to Resurrection? They wouldn't come. We don't bring 'em because—because they wouldn't come."

And all the strange assembly broke into the same weird mirth. There was something satanic in its unnaturalness. It had a hopelessness that made it awful.



"What makes you so certain they wouldn't come?" Ramson persisted.

They glanced at each other. The defiance of recklessness broke from their faces. Nothing would be concealed to-night.

"I ain't sent home a dollar in eight years," the oldest said, curtly. "Is decent folks likely to want to come to me?"

"But you hadn't nothing to send," Ramson excused him.

"I ain't wrote 'em in five." The tone was conclusive. The reply seemed all-sufficient. What could a man expect, a husband and a father, who, through five unbroken years, had left his family without a message. The others shrugged their shoulders.

After an interval Ramson spoke again. His question this time was asked with a diffidence, almost of apology.

"Ain't none of you fellows sent nothing or wrote?"

He passed his eye along the group, but each in turn shook his head. It was the world-old experience. At first letters had been frequent and remittances regular. Then came harder conditions with poorer returns, till, at last, drafts were, perforce, stopped. Then letters became only a chronicle of failure; shame overcame conscience, and the men drifted away.

Now, as Ramson's gaze rested upon them, each shook his head, and with it named the term of his silence, and the periods ranged from three to thirteen years, and the longest term was Rowe's. As the last man finished his confession they broke again into that awful violence of mirth, whereat even themselves shuddered. It was all such brutal irony. There was something so mocking in their guilt that it was like an exquisite torture.

When the youngest spoke next it was after a long, long silence. His voice now was so low, it fell upon the listeners like a far-distant whisper.

"Ain't none of you fellers got a mother?"

"I've got a mother," John Rowe said. "She's seventy by this. I ain't seen her since I left home. It's eighteen year ago to-night."

"I haven't any mother," Ramson said, in the same lingering voice, as of one who dreamed aloud. "I never had any mother, you know. Mine died when I was born,—that winter night on the plains. I've always envied people their mothers. I hain't seen many, but I kind of imagine what they'd be like. How their voices'd be gentle, and their hand soft-like on a feller's head. I used to wonder long ago, when some of you pardners used to get packages from home, how women folks 'ud write, and what they'd say. I've never wrote to a woman in my life, nor I've never had a letter from one in my life. Will you give me leave, Rowe, to write once to your mother?"

Rowe's teeth closed on his pipe with such quick energy that it broke. He took the pieces and flung them from him with an oath. He knew the meaning of the appeal: the innocent would beseech the mercy the guilty could not.

"Where's the use of troublin' people?" he said, doggedly. "When a man's well dead, let him stay dead. She's buried me, and wept over me, an'—hell!—prayed over me these thirteen years. I'm dead to her. Why should you write?"

"Because—because I want this place Resurrection."

John Rowe rolled out another oath; but the men

who stood beside him saw a tear, and they knew that the oath but disguised it.

"Write if you like," he said, sullenly, "but don't tell her what—what I'm come to."

And Ramsom replied only,—

"I won't."

#### IV.

The young man wrote that night. It was a labored scrawl, full of errors and crudities. The pen was an instrument unwieldy to those fingers. But the message it traced was a simple one, not needing much culture to express it.

"These fellers here has all been down on their luck," he wrote. "They couldn't nowise manage to draw trumps in Californy, so at last they threw up the game. Times has been very hard the last few years, and money gettin' tighter, for, you see, the diggin's got worked out. These chaps felt powerful bad about never comin' onto a stake, and they got discouraged. I didn't mind it, for, you see, I'd no one belongin' to me, bein' an orphan that lost both parents crossin' the plains. But these pardners here took it hard that they couldn't never rake in a jackpot when there was them back in the States as depended on 'em. They haven't wrote home latterly 'cause—'cause—well, I guess they was 'shamed to write, havin' never nothin' to send an' losin' heart. But they're a most distressin', miser'ble lot of men. They all kind of want to take a new grip on life up here in the Umpqua, and it seems like to me they 'ud hold the grip some'at stiddier if the place wasn't so all-fired lonesome. The pardners is afraid to write home after bein' good-for-nothin' for such a spell.

But if one could somehow get forgave, and take up with his fambly again, I think the rest 'ud pick up spirit and foller the lead. I've wrote to you 'cause you're John Rowe's mother, thinking how's it 'ud be easier for his mother to show pity than maybe for his wife. The citzens was set on callin' this place Judgmint. They can't just see their way clear to callin' it nothin' else, though there's one that's workin' hard to have it Resurrection. Your letter'll cast the vote. As you condemn or as you pardon the settlement on the Umpqua 'll be to us all, Judgmint or Resurrection."

It was singular, the influence of this letter upon those rough, degenerate men. While they knew not the words they knew the purport,—that it was a hand reached out from the darkness in a prayer for reconciliation. As it carried the story, so it seemed to carry the fate of each, and through the long weeks that followed the community lived in an atmosphere of silent but tense expectancy. The subtle excitement lifted them out of the shiftless lethargy that had held them. Their unrest dispelled their inertia, and for the first time in many years they genuinely worked, and work here, as everywhere, began to effect its saving grace. The men carried themselves with a returning sense of dignity. The vagabond air passed from the settlement, leaving it respectable.

The letter had, too, another influence. Its personal quality made it, as it were, the trial of each one's individual case. And each man's thoughts dwelt now on his own deserted fireside. In the gatherings at John Rowe's the talk was all of home. The older ones took to reckoning again the heights of their growing broods, and the younger to musing about sweethearts whose

pledges were part of that sweetly-bitter past that they had forfeited.

But the weeks passed and brought no olive branch. It was early spring when the letter had gone from the settlement on the Umpqua ; but spring faded into summer, and the long summer crept into autumn, and no word came of even the coldest greeting. They had sinned beyond forgiveness,—this was the message of the silence. They had rent the ties of duty. They were left now to the freedom and the solitude they had chosen.

Through the spring they had hoped ; through the summer they had doubted ; at the autumn they took their doom. There was no murmur, no resentment, no reproaches. There had been meted to them only justice. In their manner was a dumb resignation that made them almost gentle. The settlement had left forever the plane of the vagrant ; sorrow and suffering had touched it to heroism.

It was on a clear Sunday morning in October that they were again together. They were not religious, these men. They did not indulge in Sabbath observances. No hymning was heard, or preaching, but they rested from their labors, and collected at the one general store, to sit and to talk together. And they spoke at length of their dead who lived in the forfeited Eden ; of the lost Paradise, before whose gate stood the cherubim with the righteous sword that barred them out forever.

“There’s my Janie, now,” one said. “I never look on these yaller autumn fields, with the wind just lightly shakin’ ’em, but I think of my Janie’s hair. ‘Twas the silk of the corn,’ her mother used to say, badgerin’

her. She was small of her age, Janie was, and when she run this yaller stuff 'ud float an' sweep out behind her. The sun set t'other night, and after he dropped behind the ledge he shot up a fan like of gold, an' he brought up my Janie runnin', with her hair a-trailin' after. But—but, she don't remember her dad. I've been gone too long for that."

"I wonder now," said another, "if Susan still runs the farm. There was Miles Legrange that wanted her before she took up with me. Maybe she—maybe— It needed a man on the farm—and Miles, he never married. Maybe now they made it up again, after I was—dead."

But John Rowe spoke, and his voice was suddenly thick.

"My son, Archie, if he's grown as he used to, he's as tall as I be now. I'd forgot it all. He's been only the lad to me,—the wee, toddlin' lad I left eighteen full year ago. But he's grown by this. How comes it I'd forgot? He's grown; he's a man now. Oh!—" He raised his hand suddenly to his head, and dropped forward. The men sprang to aid him, but he waved them back,—fiercely he waved them back,—and staggered to the door. Then he turned and faced them. In his eyes was a light that left them speechless. Each looked at the other, and read his own reflected thought. The strain was reaching its fatal, pitiless end, and John Rowe's mind was going. He stood before them one long minute, then he said, hoarsely,—

"There won't never any letter come. I see it all now. I understand. It couldn't be any other way. I'd forgot somehow, thinkin' of them like they used to be. My Archie was a boy, but now he is a man. He

hates me! He curses me! I left him,—my child,—and his mother, and my mother. I was penniless, and I wouldn't go back. He'll never let 'em forgive me. They'll never have nothin' more to do with me. Oh, Mary, my love, my wife!"

He reeled, but with desperate effort he drew himself erect.

"I'm goin' away, pardners," he said. "My life is over. There's nothin' more for me. Write once again, Ramson, will you? Send just one line. Say to 'em only this, John Rowe is dead."

He turned, and throwing wide the door, passed through it. The sun was setting. It threw its glow along the street in a flood of golden splendor. As the man stepped into it, it folded him, and wrapped him about with its dying glory. The assembly arose and followed. They had all at times known this desperate hunger for death. They understood John Rowe's instinct, for they too had longed to wander away into the mountains and lose themselves. They made no movement of hinderance; they knew the man too well. They would fill the last office of comradeship: they would follow him to the outer border, then leave him, for his solitary journey into—peace.

As they emerged from the house and struck into the street, they heard the distant rumble of the stage-coach that once a month drove in from the outer world. At another time they would have halted, for the conveyance brought light provisions and mail, besides any chance passenger that had business in the valley. But the unloading of provisions was a light thing beside the tragedy of this hunted creature, staggering out before them to solitude.

As they reached the limit of the settlement John Rowe paused, looking out to the distant hills where he would rest. And across the town, into the same street, rolled the monthly coach that he had watched so long. It halted before his door, but no one was within, and seeing on the other verge the procession of citizens, the driver lashed his horses and hurried down. The men turned to greet the arrivals, and John Rowe, drawn by some lingering memory of the hope that through the months had centred in that visitant, paused also. But he did not approach, only stood looking, with vague, dreamy stupor, at the scene that was being enacted.

On the seat behind the driver sat two; one was a man, young and vigorous, and one a woman, prematurely white. Her face, though plain, had in it the loftiness born of enduring patience, and her eyes looked out with the quiet peace that only the humble know. The young man helped her to alight, and she faced the group, scanning each countenance. But she knew, and was known by, none. They looked at her—all, and she looked at them all; but never a gleam of recognition broke the strangeness of the meeting. Then she spoke, and though at first she named no name, they fell back and left the roadway open to the man that stood apart.

"His mother is dead," the woman said, "and we had to sell the farm to get the money to come. But we wouldn't make the town Judgmint when the Lord left it a chance for Resurrection. So we sold everything and moved out. And this is Archie, John Rowe's son, and I am Mary, John Rowe's wife."

Her voice, as she began, had not reached her husband, but some subtle influence had drawn him down



slowly, and when the men fell back in the open road he stood alone. As the woman ended she raised her eyes, and straight in the path before her stood the husband of her youth, old now, and broken, but to her heart unchanged,—her love in time and in eternity. She reached to him her hands in faltering appeal.

“John,” she called, “we are here; have you no word for us?”

And he caught her to his heart, while the youngest observed, quietly,—

“Friends, this here settlemint is Resurrection.”

## The Substitute.

### I.

**I**T was at the inn of a small wayside Canadian town that I met him. The war was sending many across the line. The Canadians were growing accustomed to their presence, and were losing the interest that at first had been so keen in the "Yankee."

I had been for years in the habit of running over to this quiet spot to fish and hunt, and my coming had seemed heretofore somewhat of an event. But strangers were a familiar sight now. The people had lost their curiosity over individuals, and had merged it in the mighty struggle whose centrifugal force was adding so many to the transient population of their provinces.

But the little inn had to-day, somehow, escaped arrivals. I had the place to myself from morning till late afternoon. Then he came. I knew him for an American at first glance. There was an alertness about the lad, an eager interest in everything, and a self-poise that were unmistakable. Yet he was, I judged, a rural product and untravelled. He walked in at the door with an air of unconscious independence, dropped his leathern satchel into the first chair, tossed his hat down on top of it, and called for supper.

"And I want it right straight off," he added. "I'm as hungry as a hunter."

Then he sauntered to the desk, glanced at my name, —the only one upon the register,—turned and looked

me over with a kind of amiable impudence, took up the pen, and in the bold, half-formed writing of a boy traced under my signature his own,—“Edward Clinton, Vermont.”

He faced around then, and, leaning his back up against the lattice-work, took a survey of the apartment. It was sitting-room, dining-room, and office in one.

“Queer place this,” he observed.

The remark was directed to me, but I was reading and made no reply, so, for want of other occupation, he began a circuit of the old-fashioned chamber, examining the prints upon the wall and the Indian curios that filled a shelf between the windows. But Edward Clinton was a volatile being. Soon he had exhausted the interest of the cabinet. He threw himself into a chair, stretched his feet out, and drew a short, impatient sigh. “Stupid place this,” he observed next.

But the lad was too young and too natural to be very seriously bored. He looked across to me furtively two or three times. He had an abused forlornness in his expression which amused me. He was setting me down in his mind, I was sure, for a churlish wretch who wouldn't talk and be sociable. Suddenly he had a thought; it was an impish one I knew by the gleeful smile he directed toward me. And he did not tarry in executing it. He rose, pulled from his pocket a flute, and, stepping outside, planted himself against the door-post and began to play.

Edward Clinton would have been at his best an indifferent player; to-day he was at his worst, for he undertook a tune evidently unfamiliar to him, and its elusiveness gave to his music the fretful quality of experiment. I wished now that I had talked with the scamp, but my

repentance was too late. He blew half a dozen key-notes, but none seemed acceptable. He ran along an octave to see, I suppose, if any part of it had escaped. When he had satisfied himself that the scale was all there, he left it indifferently, and went again in search of the key. This he secured at last to his own visible satisfaction. Then he began touching about speculatively for the aria. It was certainly the most involved aria I had ever heard. It aimed, I thought, at exhausting the flute gamut; and it was succeeding to a degree. Now it ran through a minor stave, now it was a ballad, and in the transition it was simply sound. But it went blithely on till an aspiring tone missed mark and struck across the air in a shrillness that made even Edward Clinton wince.

"Lord!" I exclaimed involuntarily. But the player only shrugged his shoulders. He was sticking to it, I thought, not solely to torment me, but from the headstrong obstinacy that demanded mastery. And he began back at the beginning.

This time he blew very slowly, feeling his way with the greatest caution, but at the same place he flew to pieces more hopelessly than before. Thereupon he became very angry, stamped his foot and shook his shock of hair, and behaved altogether so like a petulant, unreasonable boy that I laughed aloud.

"I'll break the thing if it goes off like that again," he said.

"The fact is, young man," I observed, "you're trying to play something you don't know."

"How could I know it? I never heard it,—not that part. The boatmen struck the shore there and quit. I was trying to pick out what the tune might be."

"Umph!" I said. "Well, you sit down here for fifteen minutes or so, and you'll hear all you want of it. The raftsmen come down the river at this hour, and that is their great oar song. Hark! don't you catch it now? Listen!"

Afar, there was audible a faint, fitful echo of music. No one was in sight. The sound floated up from the mystic distance where the river and sky were one. The sun was setting. The air was filled with the dreamy hush of evening. Over it, from the invisible, crept this pulsing breath,—the brooding presence of melody, the living soul of song. The music was intermittent, now low as a fleeting whisper, now full like a gathered flood, and slowly it swelled, growing nearer, growing stronger.

Soon we caught a murmur as of voices that rose and fell together. The rhythm grew firmer in its beat, and on it drifted now, an occasional lisp of words. Then suddenly around a curve of the river four canoes swept. In each were six occupants, whose weight bore the frail craft down till only the rims seemed afloat. The paddles dipped and lifted in visible time to the song that nearer and clearer sent its cadences over us. Now a single voice rose; its tone cleaved the stillness like some winged shaft from a bow. As it closed the banded voices broke in a refrain. They blended, they soared, and rolled their chorus down a very wave of music to the shore.

The quiet scene, the sunset, the singers and the song,—they were all in such restful harmony that, when Edward Clinton stepped forward and raised his flute, I couldn't help throwing my hands up in protestation. But it was useless.

"That's the air now," he said, complacently, and

set the instrument to his mouth. The maid appeared—I blessed her—and approached him.

“Supper’s waiting,” she said. “It’s been waiting some time. You were in a hurry.”

But he shook his head so violently at her for the interruption that she hurried within and left him.

Once again he labored with his art, and this time, as he knew what he was struggling to, he had fewer lapses, and at last he got a sort of spurious control of it. Then he turned to me and remarked triumphantly,—

“I told you I’d get it. That isn’t half a trick.”

He hadn’t told me he’d get it, but I didn’t inform him of the fact, he was so self-satisfied.

The inn was but a few yards from the river-bank. He stepped down now, and, with fullest lung, began an accompaniment to the raftsmen. It was ludicrous enough. Sometimes he was with the singers; oftener he was not. When a difficult passage was reached Edward Clinton must slow up and pick his way, and when he had struggled through it the boatmen were indefinitely beyond, so he must plunge wildly forward, clutching the tune at salient points to get abreast of the voices again. The unique quality of the accompaniment was not lost upon the boatmen. They were alert to the humor of the thing. Under the song ran a low ripple of laughter, and occasionally from some more mirthful spirit broke an outburst unrestrained, which shook through the music like the very spirit of glee. The soloist sent him the encouragement of his very strongest note; the chorus greeted him with an airy breaker of sound. Edward Clinton was some happy, guileless, irresponsible Pan piping on his reed by the river. And the young Pan blew on, growing purple in the face, till

a last united cadence closed the song, and a last united pull sent the canoes grating up the bank beside him.

Then the men alighted, and, with good-humored French inquisitiveness, thronged around him. They shook his hand, and accosted him in their homely patois, "Comment ce va?" And they plied him with questions. "You are going to stay here? You will play to-morrow? You will come with us in the canoes? You like the boat songs?" But they spoke in a foreign tongue, and he understood nothing of what they said. So they left him. The last two of each group set a canoe across their shoulders, and, with many waving of hands and counter-wavings of the flute, the raftsmen closed files and started across the town on their six-mile jaunt up the country.

As the young man looked after them he broke into a laugh. It was the cheeriest, most wholesome, most contagious laugh I ever heard. It rippled out over the stream so merrily, it floated on to the sunset, and filled the evening with its thoughtless, gay content.

Then a man approached. He was a negro. He touched Edward Clinton's arm, and asked, hesitatingly, with a series of courtesies,—

"Yo' doan' know, sah,—beg pawdon, sah,—no gent'-man dat's needin' a nigger?"

"Needin' a nigger?" The idea amused Edward Clinton. He laughed again, the same rich, infectious laugh. But he checked himself.

"Where do you come from, Sambo?"

"From de Souf, sah. We come up fur ez Mich'gan, me an' Sal. But de wuzn't no u'gent apprecation dyah fur niggers, dey got so much po' white. I done cross de line see ef mebbey dey wuz needin' niggers ober hyah

in Can'da. It's a pow'ful long ways f'om de Souf, sah."

"Yes,—yes, it is." The young man answered mechanically. Some thought had stolen in upon him that was unwelcome. He roused himself and shook it off defiantly.

"My supper," he said, with recovered equanimity; "it's stone cold, I'll bet. I'd forgot all about it."

## II.

Edward Clinton walked hastily back, entered the inn, and seated himself. There was no one else in sight, so the negro followed him.

"I's raised wid de fust o' folks, sah," the man began, anxiously, recommending himself. "I's spec-tated quality. I's a mighty valu'ble pusson 'bout a place. I reckon des a aggervatin' gang o' dem rascally niggers what's wuthless an' natchally evil. But I wuz raise wid de Coppingers."

Edward Clinton knew nothing of the Coppingers. But the fellow's faith in the far-reaching repute of his local gentry and in the finality of their indorsement made him smile.

"Yes,—yes. Great folks, of course," he said, with sly mockery.

The negro, as he talked, kept his eyes rather persistently upon the young man's plate.

"Dem dyah fowls, now, sah, on yo' plate—de Coppingers, dey ain' never eat no sich. Dey jes' order dem perjected off de table, and gib de announcement, sah, dat fried chickens, dey not fit fur gent'mens."

Edward Clinton laughed outright. The criticism had



such transparent design that its presumption was pardonable.

"And how about the eating of the chicken, Sam?" he said. "What isn't fit for a gentleman is about the right thing for a nigger, eh?"

The darky's smile broadened till it reached the full width of his face, and the young man with half-contemptuous indulgence passed him the plate. With profuse expressions of acknowledgment the astute darky took the booty of his cleverness, and, retiring to the door, proceeded to make away with it.

"Our war," I remarked to Edward Clinton, "has tossed up many waifs of fortune. Think of that fellow's drifting away up here."

"There's no money back with us to pay for help. Our people are all 'poor white,' as he calls them, now, and must do the work some way themselves," he replied.

"It's a terrible war."

"Yes." A repugnant shiver ran over him. He was silent.

"Have you ever served?" I asked.

He looked up at me furtively. There was an instant's hesitation, then he said,—

"I went to the front. I intended to enlist, but—they were bringing in the wounded and the dead. I saw them. It was frightful."

He closed his eyes as if to shut out some dreadful vision.

"I served a year," I remarked. "I was struck in the shoulder, and came home on furlough. I am up here to recruit. I shall go back next month."

"I had three brothers killed the first six months of

the war. They were men, married. I didn't really know them much," Edward Clinton said. "I have one still in the field. He went from home. He was my chum. Three ought to be enough butchered in one family. Oh, the wounded and the dead, how they looked!"

The shudder that ran through him was one of physical revolt. This boy with his happy, pleasure-loving nature, with his passionate rebellion against pain,—war would be, indeed, supremely repugnant to him. Edward Clinton had not yet lived. He had never truly suffered. He had never felt the force of that mighty moral conviction which dominates—nay, annihilates—the physical. I liked the lad; he carried his nature so openly. His was a soul, lawless, I felt, tyrannous and self-willed, but still the untested soul of youth.

"The war," I began. But the negro came in and I stopped. The maid was removing the remnants of the supper. He laid his plate down, and remarked, with the salutation in which the colored hand takes so prominent a part,—

"Thankee, sah. Much obleeged, sah. 'Pears like dat dar appertite ain' got no reasonment, sho' 'nough. No 'spectable pusson ain' gwine took de 'sponsibility o' recommodatin' no sich appertite ez dat. Sal, she al'ays takin' on 'bout it. She clean outdone sometimes. She can't explanify it no how, she say, dat sich a lean nigger teek sich a scand'lous relowance o' food. She do tribilate on dat partic'lar."

"Where is Sal?" Edward Clinton asked. "Hasn't she any appetite to-night?"

"Reckon she hab dat, sah," he assented, complacently. "She didn't git no fudder'n Mich'gan. Yo'

see, Sal, she wuz a 'ooman, an' she wuz de mammy o' Marth' Relizabet; an' dat chile, she's so natchally depraved, she r'ar an' she pitch,—yo' never see de like befo' in yo' life. We make 'quiration 'bout what de cause ob all dat meanness in Marth' Relizabet, an' de doctor he say melon. Sal, she inform him 'twuz Prov'dence, but de doctor, he stuck it out 'twuz melon. I'd my own 'pinion lodged in dis haid 'bout dat chile. It ain' consortid wid neider one ob dem two fool presentations. I b'lieve dat young un' wuz mad she git tote so fur f'om de plantation. She wuz tired ob de tromp, an' she gwine' quit, so she tooken sick. An' she git so sick ole Marse Hale, he say to me to leab Sal an' Marth' Relizabet wid de ole mistis. She done keep 'em till dat savigrous chile git well."

"What Hale was that?" Edward Clinton asked.

He asked it indifferently enough in tone, but there was a subtle lingering upon the name that awakened my interest.

"What Hale? Dat wuz Enoch Hale, sah,—ole Enoch Hale dat libe jes' out Detroit. He done reach us the han' ob assistance. I done saw de wood dyar an' take cyar de hosses. An' Sal, she jurisdiction de cookin'. Ole Mistis Hale she mighty toleratin' ob dat Marth' Relizabet; she say de place is so still sence de two young marse is off to de wah. Dat chile keep up sich commotionment the old mistis say she cyan't t'ink so stiddy on Marse Dabid. He wuz gwine to de wah two weeks befo' me an' Sal an' Marth' Relizabet git to Detroit. We wuz persidin' dyah only three days, sah, when de trouble come."

"Trouble?" said Edward Clinton. He drew himself straighter in his chair. His eyes threw off some-

what their guise of indifference. "What was the trouble, Sam?" he asked.

"Yo' know Marse Hale, sah?" the other inquired.

Edward Clinton wavered a moment, then he spoke, and his answer was direct.

"I knew one of his sons. I knew—David. But what was Enoch Hale's trouble?"

"It come, sah, befo' he gwine away."

"Before who went? David?"

"No, sah; de ole marse. Dabid, he gwine away, an' de ole marse, he gwine too."

"That's strange," Edward Clinton remarked. "I knew David had gone; but—why—why did his father go?"

"Yo' see, sah, he hab heap o' trouble. It wuz all de 'casionment ob dem niggers. De ole marse, he jedge dat dis wuz de Lord's wah to free de captibes an' make de kentry one. He wuz de mos' pertinaciously pious man, sah, an' de ole mistis, she jes' de 'Amen' to all his sent'men's. De ole marse, he assert dat de Lord's han' it wuz layin' heaby on de Souf, cos' de Souf it wuz holdin' His serbants slaves. An' de people ob de Norf, dey's de sojers ob de Almighty, fightin' in de cause ob His justice. He done gib all his sons to de Lord, he say. Some wuz daid. Dey wuz peacified in de graveyard back de town. Oh, he hab heap o' trouble, sah, de ole marse."

"Yes—yes—I am—I know all this," Edward Clinton said, a touch impatiently. "But Enoch Hale went away somewhere, you said. Where did he go, and why?"

The young man's interest was open now. He leaned forward over the table, and addressed the negro in a

tone of suppressed authority. I dropped my paper and listened. Edward Clinton noticed it, but he seemed too absorbed to care much.

“Well, sah, yo’ see, sah, ole Marse Hale he got two sons lef’. De younges’ he wuz Dabid, de chile ob de ole age. De pa an’ de ma, dey converse ’bout dat Dabid f’om de daylight to de dark. De ole mistis, she ain’ possess no reply to nuttin’; she jes’ listen hyar ef Dabid doan’ laugh somewhars. But he wuz gwine to de wah jine his brudder Greg’ry. Greg’ry wuz down helpin’ Grant drive our ole marsters; an’ Grant, he wuz conquerin’, but de wuz heaps killed in dem fights.”

Edward Clinton locked and unlocked his hands nervously. His mind was reaching out anxiously to one detail, but the negro was not to be lured or forced to any but his own method. The young man drew a quick breath of self-suppression, set his feet against the floor hard, and waited. And the negro went on.

“De night dat de great trouble come, sah, ole Marse Hale he depose de big Bible off de shelf. He kneel down, sah, an’ de ole mistis she kneel too, an’ me an’ Sal. Marth’ Relizabet she done repent an’ terminate her behavior; she wuz gwine sleep. So de house wuz all quiet an’ ord’ly. Den de ole marse he read ’bout de lan’ ob Canaan, what wuz de lan’ ob de promis’ ob de Lord. An’ he tell us dat dis Union mus’ be kep’ unitified, cos’ dis hyar is de Canaan, de lan’ ob Jehovah’s promise to all his po’ oppressed. An’ de ole mistis she begin to cry, an’ he comfit her, an’ he wuz pow’ful gentle, an’ he say,—

“‘Doan’ yo’ cry, wife deah. De Almighty He’s done sen’ us glory, fur He’s ’lectioned all our sons to be captains ob His host. An’ two, dey’s cyarin’ His

banner ter-night to plant it on de walls ob His freedom.' An' de ole mistis she response, 'Amen!' but low an' weak, fur she wuz cryin' still, sof' like. An' my Sal she lean ober an' lay her han' on de ole mistis's arm, pityin' her. But she doan' stop, an' we know she cryin' fur Greg'ry an' Marse Dabid."

A sound like a stifled gasp came from the lips of Edward Clinton. He rested his head down wearily upon his hand. He was suffering, for his brow was knotted. There was a hint of self-torture in the tone with which he directed the negro to go on. And the man obeyed.

"Sence de mistis was so troubled, de marse he bow his haid an' pray. He pray fust fur de Union, dat de Lord done let it stan' unitified. Den he pray fur de army, dat de Lord Gowd make it strong; den fur all de sojers dat wuz dyin' ter-night, martyrs fur de salbation ob de oppressed. An' he pray las' fur his sons, Greg'ry, dat froo a year done hol' up de arms ob de anointed Grant, an' Dabid, de boy, de las', what he jes' sent to jine his brudder at de front. An' dar, while he wuz pertitionin', come a soun' ob foots along de po'ch. De do' it swung open, an' froo it passed fo' men a cyarin' somet'in'. An' de ole mistis she call out, 'Enoch! Enoch! It's Greg'ry; it's our son!' An' Marse Greg'ry he say, sof' like, 'Yes, ma deah, I'se hyah. I know yo'se want to see me,'—an' he smile, Marse Greg'ry, but his mammy she doan' smile, cos' his face is so set an' white."

Edward Clinton was standing now. He had come close to the negro. He was following him breathlessly. He reached his hand and locked it on the man's arm. The muscles were tense and rigid.



"He was wounded mortally—Gregory? Tell me, was he wounded—to the death?"

But the question when put had such fateful possibilities that the young man shrank before them. His hand fell, he tottered to his seat, and, with a shudder, dropped into it. I knew now that the story of this house was more than a passing concern: it was a personal tragedy to Edward Clinton. What his connection with the family might be I could not conjecture, but its misfortunes were wringing his young soul to its very inmost fibre. I bent with a keen pity to learn what fate war had brought to Gregory.

"We didn't know, sah, den," the darky said. "We t'inks mebbe Marse Greg'ry gwine git well. De ball it wuz probated an' tuk out, an' his ma say if he kin peck up de sperets he gwine recober. An' she say ef only dat happy-hearted Dabid wuz hyar he'd cheer up de brudder an' make him well. An' when she speak de nomination ob Dabid, de sojer he groan. An' his ma ax him why he groan dat way, but he woan' tell."

Edward Clinton was gazing straight before him. His eyes were strained. There was in them a hunted look. His breath came unevenly and with effort. But the recital went pitilessly on.

"De ma she feel pow'ful bad when Greg'ry groan dat way. She ax him whar is de pain what he's a sufferin' ob. But de sojer he shake his haid gently. 'Dey ain' no pain, ma, deah,' he says. Den he inquire is he gwine recup'rate. 'I's got recober some way; I can't die. I mus' git well an' go back to de wah,' he says. But he wuz erlapsin' stiddy. De ole mistis she see Marse Greg'ry wuz troubled 'bout somefin', and she ax, 'What's dat dyah, Greg'ry, my son, yo's got go back

fur to de wah? What's yo' lef' at de front ondone? An' de ole marse he come, an' he say to him so sol-emn, 'Greg'ry, de Lord Gowd done call you. Yo's dyin', my son. What's dat yo' soul accusify yo' on? What's dat yo's lef' at de front ondone?'

"Den de sojer lay his han' ober his eyes, an' he speak, hoarse-like,—

"'Dar's a shame, fadder—done repositate—on—our—name. I got—go back an'—wipe—it—out.' An' de ole marse he tremble like de leaves. He go down on his knees agen beside de sojer's bed, an' he say, 'May Gowd tergibe yo', Greg'ry, fur yo' neber gwine fight no mo'. An' may He accep' de sacrifice ob our Dabid, who gwine wipe out yo' shame in yo' stead.' An' Marse Greg'ry he moan out loud."

Edward Clinton moaned too. It was the moan of a soul in anguish.

"An' de ole marse, he tak' de han' ob his son, an' de mistis one. All de time, wid his voice feeblin' an' feeblin', de young man he gasp out, 'Is I gwine—recober—fadder? Tell me. Is I—gwine go back—to—de—wah?'

"While dey kneelin' dar, agen come de soun' ob foots dat tromp de po'ch. Sal she ope de do', an' straight in perjec's a man. He wuz a officer. Ole Marse Hale he git hisself up, an' come fo'ward to recebe him, when de officer he speak out hard an' short,—

"'Yo' son, sah, yo' son, Dabid, what wuz drafted,—he done cheat de army. He doan' sen' no sub'st'ute nor go hissef. He done disgrace de cause; he done *flee*.'

"An' de ole marse he fall down agen de flo', an' dat officer see what he's repositated dis night on dis house;



an' it frighten him, fur he lif' de ole marse up an' lie him on de bed b'side de sojer, an' go out. An' he neber come no mo'. De ole marse he doan' speak, an' Marse Greg'ry——"

The hands Edward Clinton reached to the negro trembled as with a palsy.

"It killed Gregory? Tell me, my flight killed my brother?"

"Yo' brudder! Marse Greg'ry yo' brudder, sah!"

"I am David Hale," Edward Clinton said.

The short sentence had in it such a weight of condemnation that even the negro recoiled before it. Despite the lad's guilt, and the penalty it had entailed upon that distant home, David Hale's remorse was of the overmastering kind in whose presence no soul sits in judgment. Even he who had been the unconscious accuser was moved to soften the lad's self-reproach.

"No, Marse Dabid, sah. Yo' brudder he wuz shot in de haid. Dey wuz no hope f'om de fust. But he seem to let go his life now sence de blow had fell on his pa an' ma, an' dey know de shame wuz Dabid's an' not his. Soon de ole marse, he git up. Den he teck de sojer's coat an' 'ropriate it on hisself. 'Twuz heap too big, sah, but he draw it in wid de belt. Den he git de catriges and de young marse's rifle, an' he come an' he lean down ober de bed an' he say,—

"'Dat shame on our name, Greg'ry, yo' cayn't go wipe it out; yo's dyin'. But doan' yo' tribilate, son. *I's* gwine,—yo' fadder. *I's* gwine teck de place ob Dabid. I's ole, an' I reckon I ain't much 'count in de fight. But I'll lif' de erproach an' de disgrace off our house, an' de Lord 'll mebbe gib me strenf to hold till Dabid comes.' De sojer he move his lips,—we kin

only jes' heah him now,—an' he whisper, 'Yes, fadder, go.' An' when de sun rise dat mawnin', sah, de ole marse, he wuz gone to wah, an' de young marse, he wuz gone—to peace."

David Hale had crossed the room. His hat was on his head ; his leathern satchel was in his hand. His step was strong now and resolute ; his young face wore the splendid power of the chastened manhood that had come to him. Upon the table he dropped some coins, and, turning, passed to the door. On the threshold he paused and addressed the negro. His words were only these :

"I am going to the front. Good-by."

## The Great Concern.

### I.

WE were two of a kind, Hading and I, and the kind not perhaps of the best. We had gone to the war merrily, we boys, for plantation life, though luxurious, was monotonous, and the war promised adventure. But after Hading was shot through the hip, and I had parted with a rib, the adventure lost much of its zest.

"I think this disagreement is going a little too far," I observed to Couch, our *confrère*.

"So do I," Hading announced.

"We might maintain our honor, I should think, some other way than by blowing each other's ribs out," I suggested.

But Couch, who had won already the *sobriquet* of the "fighting surgeon," was inflexible. "Impossible, quite impossible; and so unbecoming young officers! The war must go on." Couch was a lawless fellow. He had been reprimanded three times for being in the van fighting when he should have been in the rear attending to the wounded. Later, a grape ploughed a furrow down his shoulder, and he, too, dipped the flag.

"This contention is really becoming serious," he allowed. "Something ought to be done about it."

But Hading's hip had healed by this time; he was about again, a part of the seething, passionate dissent, and he protested with warmth.

"Would you have us let the Yankees walk all over us? The cause of the South must be upheld."

A week later, in a forced retreat, Hading's hip proved treacherous. He was a gritty young scamp who in emergencies seemed to dare Providence to desert him. This time he paid for his audacity with a thrust in the side. As he lay stretched out beside Couch,—

"This affair is simply brutal," he announced. "It's slaughter. It ought to be stopped by force."

But I was recovered now, and knew that Hading was really not responsible. A man upon his back is no judge of national issues. There was only one way of looking at the matter, and I told him so.

"We are here to fight," I said, "and fight we shall while there's a man left in Virginia."

It was with such veering sentiments we fought the war through; and, though at its close we still retained life, life was our only capital,—estates, homes, they had gone with the cause of the fallen.

But Hading and I were young, and youth daunts tardily. We had recovered our natural health, and with it our sanguineness. So we took the flaunt of fortune with smiling front, and went to woo her favor in the West. Couch started also. He was always luxurious in his methods, so he chose the easier and costlier route by Panama.

We crossed the plains on horseback, and a comfortable enough jaunt it was. The first half of the journey we consumed in discussing what we had done; the last half in wondering what we would do next. We canvassed through those days every calling known to man. We began with Tubal Cain and carried the review dispassionately down to the sassafras woman at the last

station. We wanted to ascertain if there was anything of which we were less ignorant than of everything else.

"Now mining," Hading said, "must be a profitable sort of trade. You seldom hear about poor miners. They begin poor, of course,—some one grubstakes them,—but they always come upon a pocket or something and strike it rich."

"I'd like to get grubstaked permanently," I observed.

"You'd run a pocket out in a week with your appetite, Harrington," he replied, curtly.

"We'd have to keep on discovering pockets. But say, Hading, if we found gold would you know it?"

He smiled, but not sanguinely.

"Well, now, that would depend, of course, on how large the chunks were. If they were a good fair size——"

"I don't believe gold runs in chunks. I think most of it is dust."

"Dust,—the mischief!"

"Yes; they find it mostly along the rivers and wash it."

"Then that ends mining," Hading said, pronouncing his verdict. "Laundrying is out of my line."

"I don't see why we mightn't build a railroad," I ventured. "The transcontinental is going through. That mightn't be a bad thing to take up with."

"It's a little large," Hading said, dryly.

"I wasn't going to take the whole of it," I retorted. He looked at me cynically.

"No, Harry, I wouldn't; I really wouldn't."

"We'd better commence on a level stretch," I specu-

lated. "I've heard that mountain roads are great things to lose money on."

"Yes, I'd take a very level stretch ; as you say, we might lose money. By the way, do you know anything about railroads?"

"As much as you do about mining," I rejoined, maliciously. He shrugged his shoulders by way of truce, and the conversation shifted to other things.

Later I tried another tack. "Banking," I remarked, "might be a very endurable occupation. I'd incline to it if we could pull along any way till the deposits came in."

But Hading settled down upon me with severity. "Ludlow Harrington, there's no use in our founding institutions. You don't seem to have grasped the situation. You don't seem to be aware of the kind of thing we—why, dum it! Harry, can't you appreciate that we have no capital,—we have only brains?"

I gave him my rigidest military salute. "Thanks ! thanks, awfully ! Some fellows might have hesitated, you know, but——"

He struck my mare a cut of defiance.

"I didn't mean it—that way—you know I didn't, and——"

"Don't apologize, Hading," I broke in ; "a man can't help his intellect. "It's like the color of his hair : he was born with it. Really, I don't feel so poor as I did before. If only brains were marketable now we might strike a balance between our heads and our pockets."

Thus, badgering and speculating, we rode toward the land of untried fortunes, but, when we crossed into Nevada, we were still as far from a decision as when we had passed the borders of Virginia.

We had ridden these last days over a succession of hills, as parched and bare and brittle a piece of country as nature had ever thrown out. Leaving Utah behind, we had struck down the Humboldt into the Sink. The heat began to be growingly oppressive. It was the dry, parching heat of a desert. Then we started our climb upon the Nevada side. But the sun still clung to the slopes with an ardor more generous than it was welcome.

"We can't be a great ways from Gould's Pass now," Hading remarked one day as we rode along.

"Gould must be a big man," I soliloquized, "if they've named a pass after him. I reckon his is the only pass in the Territory."

"It is mountainous here—some," Hading allowed; "but I don't call it bad now on landscape."

"No, it's very good on landscape. But I'm *blasé* on landscapes, Hading. I've had them for company so long. I wish we were in 'Frisco."

"But we're going to stop over at Gould's, you know. I wrote him that we would. He and Preston were mates at the V. M. I. He's made a mint of money, they say, freighting. I've counted on getting points from Gould. I shouldn't wonder altogether, Harry, if he might do something handsome for us."

We were in a condition surely where we needed something "handsome," and we rode all day in a speculative revery. We had passed the age of credulity; we no longer counted upon god-mothers or gambled upon special concessions from either nature or Providence, but a real man with a mint of money,—the possibilities were alluring.

## II.

It was early next morning that over against a hill-side we beheld a low, rambling house, whose vivid whiteness made it a beacon as far as eye could see. It was the first habitation we had come upon in four days. This, then, was Gould's; this was the pass. We were beginning to appreciate the unique quality of Western humor. We had met it all the way from the line of the Missouri. Behind us we had left "Hangman's Gulch." No one, they told us, had ever been hung there, but members of the population were liable at any time to be hung, and they had simply named the place in anticipation. Then there was "Hope" on the very rim of the desert, and "Outlaw's Leap" at the bottom of a cañon. A tasty little tradition went with this last place. It recorded that a bandit, being cornered, and finding no place to leap down, leaped up two hundred feet and landed upon the cliff. We had admired that story, Hading and I. It credited a man with being possessed of imagination. Now, as we looked over at Gould's Pass, I felt immediately the appropriateness of the title. There was no pass. The place passed nothing, and nothing passed it; so the name was not to be challenged. And it was Gould's beyond a peradventure. Gould and his household were the sole inhabitants of the place.

We spurred up, and in an hour had crossed the stretch between and alighted at the door of the ex-Virginian. As we passed from the sun-glare, which even at this early morning hour was blinding, into the cool shelter of the broad piazza, I appreciated as never before the immunities of a roof, and I could not help giving utterance to my sense of its restfulness.



"Bless me, Gould, but this is comfort," I said, "after a fellow's ridden it two thousand miles!"

"Comfort! It's luxury,—Asiatic luxury," Hading corrected with ardor.

Gould was certainly very cordial. The house within was fitted admirably to one who had retained much of the taste and somewhat of the manner of a gentleman. His entertainment of us was lavish. He was rich,—at least his repeated incidental assertions of the fact seemed to leave us no warrant for doubting it. I didn't just like this trait in our host. Perhaps it was our own condition of indigence that gave a certain braggart flavor to his allusions. But he had captivated Hading completely.

"What a lucky dog Gould is!" he said to me that night. "Here he lives and amuses himself, and all he has to do is direct the freighters and take in the profits. Oh, he's a lucky dog, Gould." And Hading sighed.

"Don't you reckon you and I, Harry, might be equal to freighting?" he asked, presently.

"Well, I can't say, old fellow, as I'm quite in love with freighting. Nevada seems to have got mixed up some with Africa. The climate isn't exactly as versatile as I'd like, the population is somewhat furtive, and living with scenery isn't just my idea of excitement. I'm afraid it's—it's tame, Hading."

"It's time we settled down," he replied. He was disappointed, I saw. But I saw, too, within the hour that I had not shaken his infatuation.

We stayed a week at Gould's. Through the heat of the day we lounged within-doors, reading or chatting. In the evening we rode out. Our host remained ever gracious and entertaining.

Then one morning Hading broached the desire that

I saw was steadily growing upon him,—the desire for the opportunity that had brought our host his fortune. Gould smiled ; I thought a little maliciously. But he was fair.

“ You’d better stay a month, boys,” he said, “ and see the life thoroughly. Then if you still wish to open up as freighters,—I can’t keep you here, the house isn’t large enough ; but I’ve a place twenty-five miles up, and you can move out there. I’ll give you a route, and I’ll rent you enough mules to start with. Then you must go it alone.”

I knew by the light in Hading’s eyes that his destiny was sealed. I urged him to wait the month out before deciding. But, when he came up to bed that night, “ Harry,” he said, “ I’ve closed it. I took the lease in my own name, since you didn’t seem exactly to favor it ; but half of everything is yours, of course.”

Next morning we were aroused by such a storming and swearing, such hallooing and tearing around generally, as made the place bedlam. We hurriedly drew on our clothes and went down. Two dozen teamsters were saddling horses and stringing lariats, ripping the air up with oaths of a variety and vigor we had never heard equalled.

“ What’s the matter ? ” we asked of each man within reach. But they only tore past us with execrations brand-new and sulphuretted to the last degree. So we gave the men up, and went in search of Gould. We found him back of the corral, which was empty.

“ What’s the trouble ? ” we ventured again.

“ Trouble,” he replied, curtly ; “ stampede ! Two hundred and fifty mules—all broke out in the night. They’re everywhere by this.”

"What are the men—what's to be done?" I queried.

"Done! why, run them down and gather them in, of course. I've ordered all the force out." He was saddling for himself, and Hading turned to me.

"Come, Harry, we've got to help," he said.

I saw Gould turn aside. I fancied I heard him laugh.

"Yes," he said, "if you boys are going to run a freighting outfit, you might as well strike in and help head back those truants. Leave your horses; take the bronchos." With a wave of the hand he was off, his lariat by his saddle, and a look in his eye that boded much for the first victim on whom he should exercise it.

We breakfasted hastily, saddled up two of Gould's tough little animals, and set out. We rode together for perhaps twenty minutes; then off to the south I noticed a something moving. Hading thought he sighted another something a little to the west of it, and we parted.

I saw no more of Hading for a month.

That was the most memorable day of my life. Talk of the war! War was the play of a child. The sun began its dogged climb, dragging the temperature with it till I vow by all Virginia a thermometer would have registered two hundred in the shade. It would have registered so, that is, if it could have gotten into the shade. But in all that day's route I encountered not a tree, not a shrub, not a blade even, tall enough to have sheltered a self-respecting grasshopper. The heat was like no other heat that I have ever felt. It was a glaring glow that sifted in through the clothes, that burned its way into the eyes and left the very brain scorched. But the mules had chosen to go a roving, and, accord-

ingly, the entire population of Gould's Pass must go roving after them.

The one that I had sighted seemed an ingenuous, open-faced creature, and I bore down upon him fairly. But the hour that followed convinced me that, of all the erratic, depraved brutes that man has seen fit to tolerate, the scion of the ass is the worst. My open-faced friend surveyed me placidly until I had approached within ten feet of him ; then, turning squarely, he started off kicking great chunks of earth into my face, and displaying in his defiance such contempt as made his conduct a personal challenge. I resolved mentally that I would follow that fellow till I shrivelled in the pursuit. But it is singular how a man's sense of outrage weakens after he has chased it two hours in the person of such an evasive vagabond. The affront seemed at first so grievous as to be mortal. It was a thing admitting of no compromise. But at the end of two hours I was ready to apologize and withdraw. I had brought a lariat; it had seemed in the morning the right thing to do. But when I surrendered to the first mule I abandoned it. I might, perhaps, after a week's practice, have caught a post, but I realized pathetically that, unless one of these festive vagrants should, in a last piece of effrontery, insinuate his own head into my lasso, there was slight chance of its ever getting there.

I had chased the first rover two hours before I gave him up. I was convinced that he was under the immediate guardianship of the devil. But when I started after the second I reproached myself that my indignant manhood had been so fugitive a spur ; that I had been so basely vacillating as to desert his brother. This beast was fresh,—I had exchanged the devil's ward for

the devil's self. I was hot now with a heat that was consuming. The perspiration dropped from my face in rain ; I began to be parched with thirst ; I panted with rage and with exhaustion. As I started after this fellow I began to understand how those men at Gould's had come into possession of such a supply of extraordinary oaths. I hurled out three myself on the first swerve of my accursed torment. At his second I struck the spurs vicariously into my broncho, who, in bucking resentment, doubled himself up, gave a queerly concentrated hump, and landed upon his collective legs so rigidly that my bones crunched, and my temper was reformed as by magic. He was a docile enough comrade, this little broncho, after we had come to concede each other's prerogatives. But all day long he carried me with a sort of mute recognition of my incapacity. Twice he stopped dead still as though overcome with the futility of chasing mules under my direction. I was coming to realize the futility myself. I was faint and sick. I was no longer enraged ; my spirit was broken, and I would have gone back to the pass were it not for the ridicule that must greet me. I had expected to return with a long train of reprisals. Now I asked but one,—one trophy of the chase to save me from utter disgrace. The other two hundred and forty-nine I would leave to worthier men whose lariats didn't trip up their own bronchos, and who had more oaths at their command. But I was so exhausted that I dismounted. Holding securely to my rein, lest this animal too should suddenly develop truant proclivities, I disposed the broncho's small body so as to throw as broad a band of shade as might be, and in it I lay down. I was tired past utterance. I was scorched. I was parched. I

closed my eyes, and for five blessed moments forgot that I had come West and was in quest of fortune. But when I casually opened them again I saw where off towards the horizon my booty was slowly vanishing. This mule was my last hope. To attack a third was despair,—worse, it was insanity. My only possible chance was in clinging to the one out of whom I had already taken four dreadful hours of freshness and of trickery. So I climbed back onto my mount, and, as the hybrid was growing to a speck, started again in jaded pursuit of him.

All the length of that day I followed. We rode, I solemnly believe, half the length of Nevada. We climbed, I know, its entire height.

Around three o'clock, on some new freak, the leader faced suddenly about, and headed approximately in the direction of the pass. This had certain comforts. I would now be saved the trip into Arizona, though, of course, I could not be certain that I would not fetch up in Idaho instead, and between the two there was small choice of attraction. But the afternoon developed a second feature of hope. The mule began to give out. I might perhaps now by remorselessly pressing have run him down, but the last shred of ambition had gone from me. As the fugitive slackened pace, I slackened with him. From a wild, mad chase we got down to a sort of canter, then to an amble, then to a walk. And at a walk we made our dejected way home. The sun was setting as we hove in sight of Gould's. The corral was nearly full ; the stampede was over ; the mules had been secured. As I neared the house a freighter was riding up ; behind him trailed the remnant of the fugitives,—all, that is, but mine ; and he, the miscreant,

catching sight of his companions, uttered a low, delighted bray, and, with a last kick, as though spurning the very dust of a memory of me, was off to join the captives. I rode slowly up to the freighter.

"You see that hind mule," I said; "he's the devil. I've brought him in alive, but——"

And the freighter smiled. Then I took out a pencil and a scrap of paper and wrote,—it was very short,—

"You can have the ranch, Hading, and the route and all the profit. I'm off for 'Frisco. No mules in mine.  
HARRINGTON."

I gave this also to the freighter, and going around, saddled my good Nancy and struck out straight for the Pacific metropolis.

### III.

I had been a month in 'Frisco. We had left Virginia, Hading and I, with rather hazy ideas of the Pacific Slope. We knew only that it was the land of gold, of sunshine, and of prospects. We had not straightly defined what we expected of California,—definiteness is always disenchanting, and it needed some glamour to sustain us over three thousand miles of country. Now I was brought face to face with Western advantages and Western extremities, and my experience was not encouraging. The climate whetted my appetite maliciously, but appetite did not somehow whet opportunity. I realized with serious clearness that, as I was not specially fitted for anything, nothing was specially fitted for me. I had begun with demanding conditions that insured fortune; I ended with asking the immediate means of sup-

port. But my fourth week closed leaving me moneyless, foodless, workless. I had Nancy, my mare, but she was a companion, not a commodity,—I did not for an instant think of selling her,—and I had nothing merchantable besides. I was in a dire strait indeed.

I was passing along Market Street, wondering what in all complications was to come to me next, when out of Kearney turned a man whom I took at first glance for a fakir. He was gotten up grotesquely to mercantile ends. He wore a vivid green coat, a hat of the steeple variety, and trousers whose uncompromising stripes combined such colors as had escaped the rest of his costume. On his breast and on his back were strapped placards bearing the interesting announcement, "The Lantern's Come," "The Lantern's Come." Accompanying the peripatetic was a horde of hoodlums, who ran in front and tagged behind, lending to the show the homage of their indorsement. I stepped aside to let them pass, then continued on my way, becoming, inadvertently, the wake of the straggling procession. I looked at the motley, indigent mob, and felt with a kind of shiver the fitness of my position. I was not yet ragged and unkempt like the rest of the Lantern's escort, but I was emptier. So I accepted my post in the forlorn rear, and supported the column into an open acreage where stood a tent. About it had collected already many interested spectators. I read the glaring handbills that bestrode the canvas. This, then, was the magic-lantern show. As we came up a second grotesque embodiment of its attractions surveyed us from the tent fold. He was taking in the tickets. Admissions were only casual; business was not rushing. He passed his eye over the procession with the listlessness



of long familiarity. But at sight of me his interest quickened. Presently he nodded ; I smiled gruesomely. It was an acceptance of my alliance,—a welcome to the fraternity of mountebanks. He continued to scrutinize me for some time in the intervals of work. At last he crossed over to where I leaned against a tent-pole.

“Want a job?” he asked, with the frontier directness that strikes one like a club.

“Well—well,” I replied, rallying myself from the concussion, “that depends. I don’t know but—but I do. What have you?”

“I’m the proprietor of this here show. I want some one to stand out there close by the sidewalk an’ peddle tickets.”

“No,—thanks !” I replied, icily.

“Needn’t hawk ’em if you don’t want to,” he said, amiably. “Jist call, Tickets, tickets ! Git yer tickets here ! Tickets for the only gинуine Western show ! Tickets for the lantern !”

It was all so satanically preposterous that I laughed aloud. I, an officer of the — Virginian ; I, a Harrington, become sutler to a magic lantern !

“It’s three dollars a day and commission,” the picturesque proprietor announced. “I didn’t give the last chap but two and a half ; but you’ve a kind of fetchy way with you. I think you’ll be worth the raise.”

My disdain remained hotly, fiercely intolerant ; but a fig-woman came along and set herself directly in front of me. I had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours ! I was ravenous. Dignity, respect,—decency, even,—fled before my base voracity. I took the pasteboards, and, stepping out, began my first work in the West. And

that shrewd purveyor had gauged me to a nicety. He had discovered to me at last my latent aptitude. I had, indeed, a "fetching way" on tickets. Within twenty minutes I had taken in nine dollars and fifty cents, and had eaten up half the woman's basket of figs, —to which, after each sale, I had devoted my private proportion of the proceeds. When the proprietor came over to inspect returns, I had a record indeed.

"You're jist doin' first-class," the man encouraged me. "You've took in more'n the box-office. I knew you'd show up fine on this kind of thing, and you can have the job just as long as you give satisfaction."

I thanked him becomingly and turned to my work again. My appetite was, after a fashion, satisfied, and I began to experience the reaction of my fast; I was contented and I was sanguine. Then the humor of my situation took possession of me. This was novelty, indeed. I was truly the sport and jeer of a very rakish fortune; I was a lark for Fate. Well, I would feed his mirth even as the figs had fed mine. My caste dropped from me; I felt within the rollicking soul of a fakir. No longer did I disdain to hawk my wares,—nay, I yearned to hawk them. I was part of the life, yes, of the very traditions of the guild. I laughed aloud at the gleesomeness of the thing, and, mounting a box that chanced to be at hand, I began my harangue.

"Tickets! Tickets for the lantern! Every country on the globe-passes before you. Every notable of history walks the canvas. Come in and see Mark Antony. Come in and clasp the hand of Hannibal. Tickets! tickets here, gentlemen, for the greatest moral entertainment of the age! Show changes every ten seconds. Don't fail, boys, to see the three dromedaries

and the sheep that stands on its head. Show changes, friends, every ten seconds. This way for your tickets! This way for your tickets!"

The lantern was taking immensely. The box-office agent, in defence of his returns, was forced into my methods. He rose in his place and took up the refrain, but he shook his fist at me across the space. His resentment served only to rouse my latent oratory. I leaned out over the crowd, waved my arms with the fervid frenzy of the fanatic, and called off such a list of attractions as made my very own eyes dilate. In the midst of it I glanced off and saw a man smile. Then he started; then he stared. Then he uttered an exclamation of dazed, incredulous surprise. It was Couch, our fighting surgeon,—Couch, my old *confrère*. He dashed up, and in a moment had seized me.

"Ludlow Harrington, by all the gods! How did you come here, and what are you doing?"

"I came from—home," I stammered, shamefacedly, "and I'm—I'm selling—tickets."

"Are you the owner of—are you running the—attraction?" he ventured. He was visibly set about for the kind of question that would put him in possession of the situation without revealing all he thought of it.

"Alas! no, friend," I said, dismally, recovering myself. "I have no such good fortune. I am only a poor outrider. The lantern belongs to a bigger man,—there he is, the dappled personage standing yonder by the door."

Couch looked at the fantastic proprietor, then at me. He could contain himself no longer, and rolled out one of the old cheery peals which brought the past back so refreshingly that I seized his hands and wrung them.

Just then a man pressed in between us. It was such a superfluous bit of impertinence that I took hold of him.

"Well, sir," I observed, "can't you go around gentlemen instead of between them?"

He looked at me a moment stolidly. Then he asked with slow composure,—

"How much money have you took in on them tickets, young man?"

"What business is that of yours?" I flashed. "Are you running this show, or am I?"

"Well, you're—tryin' to. I'm sent down here to seize these gate receipts for the hotel bill. The owner of this here travellin' performance has been boardin' up to the Great Western everythin' he owns exceptin' that menagerie you have been blowin' so hard about. Before you folks skip the town, the hotel'd like the handlin' of a little of them proceeds."

I made a brave effort to save my master's exchequer. I argued, I protested, I bandied, I bullied, to the great delight of the crowd; but the officer was obdurate.

"Don't you run your head agin' the law, young man," he counselled. "I've come here to attach this money. If I can't attach it, I've got to attach you."

"Give it up, Harry," Couch urged me. "This is a pretty bad speculation you've gone into, and the sooner you're quit of it the better."

So I took out a dollar.

"I, as an employé, am a preferred creditor," I announced, solemnly. "This dollar I attach myself. The rest is at the mercy of the law."

I walked back to the proprietor, whom I found with the same violence of protestation yielding up his funds. So I thanked him for the courtesy with which he had

treated me during our brief engagement, trusted that under brighter financial auspices I might again have the privilege of hawking his lantern, resigned and withdrew.

Couch and I sauntered back together from the scene of my first engagement. I gave him now a full account of our trip West, of our visit to Gould's, of the mule episode and my consequent retreat, leaving to Hading the Nevada fortune. Then I told of my month in 'Frisco, of the sinister flight of my money, and of my final succumbing to the magic lure of the lantern.

"This coast," he said, reflectively, as I ended, "has her hands full providing for the South. Every man that can raise the money is headed West, and we're almost all what economists call unskilled. We'll get out upon ranches in time and become the agricultural backbone, but meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile," I broke in, "it's mules and magic lanterns."

We were opposite the post-office now. We stepped in, and Couch inquired for mail. I had stopped an hour ago,—before I had formed my alliance with "The Slide,"—so I occupied myself while I waited with glancing over the list of "uncalled fors" pinned up against the wall. There among the "H's" I chanced upon one "Ludlow Harrington, San Francisco, General Delivery." I walked to the window, and it was handed out. As we stepped into the street again, I tore the envelope, drew the letter from it, and read aloud to Couch.

"20 MONTGOMERY ST., 'FRISCO.

"DEAR HARRY,—Where in the world are you? Come to me. I'm here—broke—with an agency for soap.  
HADING."

The summary was so irresistible that, despite our sympathy, we were obliged to relieve ourselves. But our laughter had in it, I think, no ungenerous note. We set out by the nearest route for Montgomery Street, and here we found Hading in a very small room, sitting before a very small table, on which were set out for contemplation his various samples of soap.

"Well, old fellow," I said, clasping both his dear, obstinate hands again, "how's Nevada?"

"Harry!" he said, reproachfully.

"How's freighting? Was the route good? Did you bring the mules along? Did any of them break away?"

He looked at me with grave, pathetic eyes and sighed. But it was not in human nature to refrain.

"'Pon honor, now, Hading," I asked, confidentially, "how many brutes did you catch that day, and what time did you get in?"

But he made no reply,—only shook his head, and I tried him on another tack.

"I say, Hading, how many mules did we rent? and how much of Nevada goes with the ranch?"

But the poor wretch took me so meekly that I grew ashamed.

"Never mind, old chum," I said, cheerily, "we've got all our brains left."

Then he smiled, but not with a genuine gayety.

"I don't see, Harry, how you can joke when we're in such a predicament," he said. "It's no joking matter, I tell you. What are we to do for a living?"

"Well, you'll sell soap, and I—I'll go along and sell water."

"I'm done with soap," he announced, dismally.

"I've been out four days, and I've taken in just one order ; that isn't to be delivered for two months."

Then Couch, who, failing of a chair, was balancing himself upon the ridge of Hading's trunk, drew from his pocket a roll of bills and counted them.

"Here, boys," he said, "are three hundred odd. We've fought together and we've failed together. Now, while there's a dollar we'll share it. Come, with three fertile brains we're bound to turn up something before this is spent. Meanwhile, we must take what comes like soldiers. But before anything else gets a chance to come let's go back to the hotel and fortify ourselves in a dinner of compensation."

And we went blithely out with the buoyant spirit that attends a revived exchequer.

#### IV.

Our dinner was a financial holocaust. Couch ordered it, and Couch was a *gourmet*. His prodigality should, by all laws of economics, have kept our fighting surgeon in perpetual penury. But the very stars in their courses seemed to fight for the scamp. Friends came to his emergencies, the unforeseen rose to parry disaster, and retribution knew him not. He attributed his immunities to one observance,—

"I keep a goodly savor in the nostrils of the gods."

And his explanation had in it certainly some measure of warrant, for nothing short of the Jove-scenting of that feast could account for all that came from it.

We were waited upon by the prince of servers,—a Celestial. He seemed to be peculiarly attached to our host, whom he addressed always as "Sabe mucho." We asked the origin of the title.

"You see," Couch said, "the day I got in here the fellow fell going up-stairs with my valise. He's a clumsy heathen, and those stilts that he walks on make him clumsier yet. He rolled down, in company with my baggage, and struck against everything in sight. I set his arm for him,—you notice it is still in the sling. He did me the honor to be impressed with my ability; hence the name."

Many, both before and after, rendered glad tribute to the skill of our fighting surgeon. The name seemed peculiarly suitable, and I saw that it rather pleased him.

After dinner we mounted to Couch's room, a large, luxurious apartment, as befitted one who never thought so meanly of mankind as to economize.

Hading and I dropped down into chairs; Couch set out some cigars and wine, and, extending himself upon the lounge, clasped his hands behind his head, and gave himself up to revery.

We all smoked silently for a time, then Hading, whose freight and soap experiences seemed to have stimulated his mercantile sense abnormally, remarked,—

"I wonder now how much these chaps make on this hotel?"

Couch raised himself upon his elbow.

"I'll ring, if you wish, and inquire," he said, dryly.

"No, pray. I was only wondering if hotels in general pay."

"They haven't paid me," Couch replied, sententiously. "I had five hundred when I got in ten days ago. Now I'm down to—well, counting out my dinner—about two hundred and sixty. I don't think, Hading, hotels are paying—to the guests. I was just asking myself this morning whether for a man situated



as I am it was wiser to diminish expenditure or to increase income. Since I have met you two I have decided."

"Which do you advocate?" Hading asked.

Couch drew the cigar from his lips and set it slowly down. Then he folded his hands about his knee and announced, "Both. You see," he continued, "it was all right for you fellows to come West, but for me it was ingratitude. When a man has thrown himself into the arms of chance, and chance has adopted and provided for him through thirty-two years, it's out and out, perfidy to chase to the other side of the continent where he has no friends. Now, I, too, in the picturesque language of the native, shall have to 'rustle.'"

This remark threw Hading back precipitately to the discussion that had held us all the way from Virginia into Nevada. He reviewed again every recorded source of wealth, from Solomon's cedars to the last patent collar-button. It was not enlivening. Couch drew over the morning's paper and fell to reading.

Hading and I were absorbed in calculating our chances as purveyors of ice, when Couch jumped up, uttered an exclamation that might have done effective service even upon the Gould ranch, kicked the paper-basket across the room, and tossed his valise after it.

"Why, by all the canonized, didn't we think of it long ago!" he said, disgustedly. "What's the matter with us, anyway? Why, we were born to it. We've breathed it all our lives; we've——"

"What is it? What in the world is it?" Hading and I called, breathlessly.

"Gentlemen—and officers," he added, impressively, "we're contractors." And we gave a genuine "hur-

rah," for we knew that inspiration had come direct from the Pythian, and we believed thenceforth that Couch's genial deity had adopted us also.

"What'll we contract for?" Hading asked, after our first gratuitous outbreak had subsided.

"Contract for?" he retorted. "Why, for anything."

"Of course," I insisted. "That's the magnificence of the discovery. It's so—so indefinite,—so comprehensive."

"I should say so," our surgeon chimed in, coming to his own defence. "Why, here in to-day's paper are five advertisements for bids on contracts. Just listen."

He picked up the paper and turned to the section that had given him his sudden inspiration.

"First, contract for gas-piping. Well, as a physician, I don't approve that contract. We'll pass it. Second, bids for calking. Calking! I never calked much of any myself. I've no doubt it's a delightful occupation. It consists, I believe, in hammering stuff into holes. I—still—it's rather sedentary. I think we'll have to pass it, too.

"Third, bids on vats for a brewery. What on earth do they use vats for in a brewery, do you suppose? Vats, vats,—I don't know quite what purpose they serve."

"Maybe," Hading suggested, "they use vats on this slope to drink out of."

But Couch looked at him so severely that he withdrew the hypothesis.

"Fourth," the reader went on, "bids on wood to be delivered at Washoe."

I saw poor Hading wince.

"Pass it," I called, "quick! It means freighting, and Washoe is down by Gould's."

The surgeon gave a little sly chuckle at our discomfiture, and went on to the last.

"Fifth," he read, "bids will be opened on the thirteenth, at Room 4, of the City Hall, for the grading and paving of the mile of street herein below described, to wit."

Then followed a long, technical description of the work, the nature of the material required, the time, conditions, etc., etc.

"There," Couch said, as he ended, "is our Rubicon. We must take that contract."

We discussed the matter in all its bearings through the next half-hour, and discussion only fixed our conviction that we had at last found the goal of all our vagrant aptitudes.

Next morning we went cheerfully out to establish ourselves. Upon this matter our surgeon announced that he had principles, and Couch's principles were something to encounter.

"It's out of the question," he insisted, "for us to take life in a small way. It's not only impolitic, it's vulgar." And he rented forthwith a five-room suite of offices in the handsomest building of the town.

"Whatever in all fate we are to do with five such rooms, Couch, I would like to know," I began, when we again got the prodigal alone.

"Only two of them are for the contractors," he replied, airily. "My first love and my last love is surgery. I shall go back to her when I have capital enough. I intend on this paving to make a stake. Then I shall set up in those three end rooms, distinguish myself

somehow, and step out serene on the king's highway."

The confidence of the fellow was contagious. Though when he ordered up the finest furniture that San Francisco afforded,—surgical chairs and cases, carpets and engravings, and added a supply of wines and cigars that would have served for a platoon,—I must confess that Hading and I groaned, and that little short of moral cowardice held us to our vagabond compatriot. At this time in the West thirty days was accounted cash, and it was upon this margin that Couch was gambling.

I had urged him to begin at once gathering such information as would give us some vague, far-away conversance with the business of street paving. But the fellow was obstinate.

"We have a week,—that's as good as a year. I can't go into any side issues till the firm's rightly located."

Side issues ! Truly, Couch was the most exasperating partner two helpless men had ever anchored to. If we failed of this contract we were lost,—worse, we were disgraced, and that criminally. But the situation acted strangely upon Hading. Its very desperateness fired him with his old boyish audacity. We had had much in pawn in other perils ; Couch had thrown into this our last possession,—honor ; everything was at stake now.

## V.

It was during the second afternoon that, as the furniture was being settled, a young man opened the door, half entered, and, seeing his mistake, was withdrawing with an apology. But the splendor of everything seemed

to arrest him a moment ; he stood glancing about in visible surprise.

"Come in, sir," Couch called, amiably, with the good-fellowship which had yet such a subtle reserve of breeding.

Thus bidden, the stranger stepped into the room.

"Very handsome quarters you have here," he remarked.

"Simple," the other replied, with a little deprecating shrug ; "but sufficient for plain people. Won't you sit down, Mr. —?"

"Lingre,—of the *Alta*," the man said, answering the interrogatory of the inflection.

Couch bowed his acknowledgment.

"I am pleased to know you, Mr. Lingre. Permit me to introduce my partners, Mr. Hading and Mr. Harrington, of Virginia." This was what he said, but a sudden deepening of the tints in his eyes told me he was thinking of other things. Some game was afoot ; I read it in the artful way the head of our firm began to direct the incidental conversation that ensued. But his voice retained the suave, listless cynicism of a *blasé* man of the world, and he rambled from theme to theme with a mental lawlessness that was infectious. Mr. Lingre began to be interested. His journalistic instinct was finding in Couch and his unwonted magnificence available copy. We were new men ; we were an item ; he proceeded to draw the firm out. And Couch was allowing himself to be drawn out with the nicest skill, of reluctance. He shifted gradually from generals to particulars. Presently he had out the cigars, then he got to something stronger, till in the hour that followed, fortified by a flow of champagne that might have be-

fogged the brains of the whole *Alta* staff, Mr. Lingre was put into possession of such a history of our past, our present, and our future as, under the lens of a spirited imagination, promised much for to-morrow's issue. As the gentleman rose to go, Couch gave him his final item. "Yes, sir," he said, straightly, "if any man in the South had on his hands bigger contracts than we three during the entire period of the war, I would like to pay my respects to him."

To which Hading added,—

"And we are proud to be able to say, Mr. Lingre, that through the long struggle every contract was met with honor at whatever cost to ourselves."

I withdrew to the seclusion of my private office, and fell to ruminating upon what a parcel of liars our firm had become.

Next morning we were treated to such a review as made me feel for a month the rankest impostor that ever went undenounced. The panegyric was headed in very conspicuous type :

### "THE GREAT CONCERN."

Under it, in slightly smaller print, was the sub-title, "The Quality of Men our New West is drawing from the South." Then followed through three columns such an account of our careers, of our financial resources, of our ability, and of our social influence as might confirm to California at last a warrant for her existence.

When our surgeon finished the article he set it down and rubbed his hands together complacently.

"That's excellent !" he observed. "That's capital !

That's good for six weeks at least from the hotel. We might as well take in the theatre to-night, boys." Then I turned to the spendthrift.

"Couch," I said, "give me up your money. You'll squander it, every cent."

"Well, I ought to give you up some," he allowed. He drew out what remained—about a hundred and fifty—and divided it equally. "Here, Harry, is fifty," he said; "and here's Hading's. Now, you two can be just as virtuous as you like with your own, but don't you sit Catos, or try to bully me over mine. I'm going to the theatre."

I took the money, as did Hading. I thought it the only way to insure Couch anything whatever of a reserve. And it was fortunate that I did, for in two days he was down to his last ten dollars.

As the firm was now established to the satisfaction of its senior member, we went forth to try and compass the methods of the paving business. We got together all the figures we could collect of bids that had been handed in upon city work, but the advertised streets had several erratic features, and, at the end of three days, we confessed that our bid must be an awfully blind stagger at a price.

Then I had an idea. "That young engineer down at Todd's," I said, "seems to know his business. Why don't we get him to figure?"

The suggestion met with approval, and early next morning Hading went down with me.

"We've made up our prices on the paving," I said to the engineer; "but, as we're strangers here, we may be a shade or so off on our data,—on wages or blocks. We would like to verify our estimate by that

of one accustomed to local work. We want a safe, conservative bid."

"A third margin?" he asked.

"Yes, a third," I said.

Thus I shielded our ignorance and secured our safety. At noon we had the figures; Hading had paid for them out of his money. The details were set forth with such masterly clearness that I was again impressed, and I remarked to the firm,—

"If we secure this work, I will certainly get that young fellow to superintend its execution."

And Hading replied pensively,—

"I hope the execution won't leave my pocket as shrivelled as the estimate has."

## VI.

But two days remained before the closing of the bids. We had taken now to patronizing the hotel lobby, where we had met many of the business men of the town, and where we could get at much of the private details of events.

We learned here that early in the week there had been five contractors who had announced their intention of trying for the paving. Upon the appearance of the *Alta* article two had withdrawn, feeling that it was useless to enter into competition with a firm which had so visibly "the inside pull." Three contractors remained. Of these one was a Mormon from Utah; the second, an Englishman, small and dapper; the third, a San Francisco personality, Oliver Olds. Olds was a bachelor, very rich and very eccentric, who still put in bids upon everything because he had made his fortune that way, though he seemed always rather relieved when he failed



to be the winner. The Mormon and Olds we met, and I regret to say that neither seemed to take very cordially to our firm. They resented, perhaps, the presence of a rival in a field which they had pre-empted.

As the last day dawned,—the day of fateful destiny,—we three members of the Great Concern dressed in silence, I was, I fear, despondent. Hading was in that mood of alert recklessness that I remembered so well in war time. Couch alone was cool,—nervy and complacent to the end.

I was always ominous of this phase in Hading, and I suggested now that we have out Jerry and Nancy and take a canter. He agreed, and at eleven o'clock they sent word from the office that the horses were at the door. The bids would be closed at five; we had still six hours' respite of hope. We descended, Hading and I, for our jaunt. Couch went down with us to get an inkling, if possible, of the figures of the other contractors.

As we entered the lobby we met Olds and the Mormon. Olds accosted us indifferently, but in the Mormon's salute there was a latent animosity that was unmistakable. I left the fellow and crossed the room for a cigar; Couch joined me. But Hading, in one of his perverse impulses, sat down beside the man as though the animosity were a personal imputation which he resented.

These were the early days when every man carried arms; not that life upon the frontier was always insecure, but because it was liable at any time to become so.

Exactly what followed I could not tell. Some minutes elapsed in which the conversation seemed waxing hotter and hotter. Couch and I started across the room

to restrain Hading. We had gotten but a few feet when I saw the Mormon rise angrily, and, shaking his fist in Hading's face, exclaim,—

“Yes, and everybody knows you fellers have been saltin' the City Hall, and——”

“It's a lie!” Hading thundered.

“'Tain't a lie!”

“It is a lie.”

“You shall prove it.”

“I will prove it.”

The Mormon put his hand back, for what we did not know; but before he could move Hading had drawn his revolver and fired. We leaped to him, Couch and I; but the wounded man had sunk to the floor, and the blood spurting from his wound was crimsoning everything. Hading stood beside him, oblivious utterly to the new misfortune he had brought upon us. So I seized him by the arm and drew him aside.

“Quick, boy, quick!” I gasped; “onto Jerry and away! Here, take this!” I drew from my pocket twenty-five dollars. “Take this and fly! Let Jerry prove his blood. Make for the hills! Make for—for Nevada!”

I swear I meant no cruelty; the name slipped from me by accident. But the memory of Hading's last look was one of a pained reproach. Two minutes later he was dashing across the town, making for the safety of the mountain fastnesses; and within an hour sheriff and posse, mounted and armed, were after him in hot pursuit.

Meanwhile, Couch, drawing off the Mormon's coat and opening up his shirt, proceeded to determine the nature of the wound he had received. The ball had entered the arm, where it had lodged, and the blood was

flowing profusely. But a critical examination satisfied the surgeon that the hurt was not a serious one,—a fact which he hastened to announce to the by-standers.

With the strain of uncertainty removed, and speech restored to its Western freedom, there was a vigorous denouncement of the high-handed manner of the shooting. Poor Hading came in for little quarter. He was insolent, he was vicious, he was lawless, he was dangerous. Olds even capped reproaches in a climax,—that the Vigilantes should hang such men on sight. I was helping Couch attend to the Mormon. At the last remark I saw him straighten up. There was an ugly fire in his eyes.

“Do you charge men here with anything you please and expect to pay no penalty?” he asked, hotly.

The by-standers left the reply to Olds, and Olds was angry and met the question without parrying. In the moments that followed, had the Californian held to the charge of bribery, had he vented his abuse upon Hading alone, or even confined it to our luckless firm, I think the end might not have been. But in a heated retort he spoke a word,—it was a fateful word,—“Rebel.” The taunt struck home. All the fiery rancor of the war leaped back into the Virginian. I reached my hand instantly to avert the catastrophe, but, evading it, Couch stepped out. Not with Hading’s blind, impetuous aim, but in a sort of grim relentlessness, he fired. And Olds uttered a cry, keen, piercing, and fell back upon the chair that he had left. For one awful moment Couch stood there. Then he bent, tore the vest open, and the shirt. The blood was oozing slowly from Olds’s breast. He rose and came to where I stood apart, beside the Mormon.

"It's fatal, I'm afraid, Harry," he said. "It has grazed the heart. I'm done for. I might as well give myself up."

But I seized him by both hands.

"Couch, for your own sake—for my sake—for Virginia's sake—quick ! Nancy is at the door ; she's saddled. No horseflesh on the Slope can ride her down. Here, take these twenty-five ! A minute and your chance is gone. Go ; ride for your life ! Make for the mountains ; you'll find Hading. He's headed for—for Nevada."

I had drawn him with me to the door in those few seconds when the paralyzed crowd stood dumb before the tragedy of a second victim. Before one could move I had loosed the hitching-strap, pressed my comrade's hand in a last clasp of loyalty, called to my Nancy, and—Couch, too, was off like a flying wind to the hills. An hour later the deputy sheriff and a second posse, mounted and armed, were hot upon his trail. I was alone,—alone with the Great Concern.

## VII.

I turned now and walked back across the lobby. All the way the crowd opened and made a passage for me. I read in their eyes the meaning. We were a dangerous brood, we three, hot-headed, reckless, defiant,—clearly men to be avoided. I passed silently along the opened path, and, going up-stairs, shut myself into my room.

The events of the last hour had come so suddenly, and were in results so momentous, that they were paralyzing. I sat, I knew not how long, trying to get my bearings upon the new situation. Two of the firm were

outlaws now. Hading might get off with a fine or an imprisonment ; but Couch had aimed fatally,—there was little hope for him. He was not alone an assassin, but, as Olds had taunted him, a rebel ; he would find little mercy if he were caught. And for the defence of two men I had one dollar,—the dollar I had earned as huckster to the magic-lantern show. It was a day of disaster surely to the Great Concern.

But by and bye I roused myself. I alone was left of the company. Upon me fell the task in this supremely perilous hour of defending its reputation. If to my partners' personal adventures was added commercial collapse, their fate was sealed. I rose. The Great Concern was being forced to the wall, but it would not go down without a last fierce fight for survival.

I took up our bid and walked to the door. Then for the first time I realized the financial aspect of the late affairs. The shootings were tragedies indeed, but they had disposed of two of the contractors ; the Mormon and Olds were *hors de combat*. We had left but one competitor,—the Englishman. I went rapidly downstairs into the lobby. It was three o'clock now. His friends had just removed Olds from the hotel to his home. The crowd still lingered. I glanced about for the little Englishman ; he had stepped to the rack for his hat. Sticking from his breast pocket was the end of a large white envelope. My heart leaped ; he had not yet left ; his bid was not yet in. I hurried out, and, walking straight to the City Hall, took my place in the door-way. Not long after, coming slowly down upon the other side of the street, I beheld the last rival of the Great Concern.

As he came opposite me he glanced over ; our eyes

met ; that was all, but he understood. He halted, and for several tense moments we stood so. In my face there was, I knew, the calm resolve of a desperate man. He walked around the block and came up upon the other side ; but my eyes were fixed upon him grimly. I hated the part I was playing. I despised bluffing, and I was not naturally a bully ; I desired always to meet my opponents like a gentleman in a fair way. But whatever might be the Englishman's need of the contract, he had not at stake life. This was not to him a matter of national disgrace. And what less would it be to our South if Couch, one of her most illustrious defenders, were hung here for murder ? I had no choice ; I did but as I must. Through the two longest hours of my existence, silent and unflinching, I stood in that door-way and held our last competitor at bay. The street was almost empty ; the town was at the hotel discussing the details of the double shooting ; we had few interruptions to our drama. Twice the man walked almost to where I stood, but my hand was on my hip pocket ; he passed, and left me in possession.

At exactly ten minutes before five I called a newsboy, —he was at the corner now, straining his lungs over the "extra" that our tragedy had evoked. I handed him my last dollar,—the dollar sacred to the memory of the collapsed lantern.

"There," I said, "that's yours if you earn it. Go across the street and bring me a pen and some ink."

He passed me over the bundle of papers that his speed might not be retarded, and within three minutes he was back. I took from my pocket our white envelope.

"The Great Concern," I soliloquized, "is without

competitors ; it holds the field alone. It raises its bid twenty per cent."

Then I folded the paper and returned it to its case.

"Now," I said, impressively, to my young Mercury, "I want you to go up-stairs to the office of the City Engineer, and hand this in to him at the desk. See to it that you have your wits about you and get the right room."

"I hain't sold papers four years at this yer stand an' don't know the City Hall, leastways as well as a—tenderfoot," he observed, disdainfully. With which parting shaft he left me and mounted to the office above. Almost immediately he was with me again.

"I gev it in to the ingineer hisself," he said ; "here's his card."

He tossed it to me with a contempt which my distrust of his ability amply justified. Helping myself to a copy of the extra, I gave him back his bundle. Then I drew out my watch. Across the street another man was drawing his also. It was five o'clock,—the bids had closed. I bowed to him sadly, humbly, apologetically, but with an oath he turned on his heel and walked away.

I crossed now to a side-street where I could be quite alone, and sauntered back towards the hotel. On the way I opened the paper and read its account of the episode.

The Great Concern was not confined to-day to a miserable three columns. We had the entire sheet, and the headings reminded me someway of the placards that decorated the magic-lantern tent. We were to-night the most widely-known men on the Slope. We were not set before the public gaze in exactly the flattering

lineaments we wore four days ago, but we hadn't paled any in interest. In fact, I do not know what was lacking to make us the most uniquely fascinating villains of modern tragedy. Our birth, our war record, our wealth, our magnetic personalities—I became so absorbed in the trio I forgot quite that I was one of them, —I, the forlorn, bankrupt embodiment of the Great Concern.

But I turned quickly to the last item of the record. How fared it with the hapless sufferers? And I read :

“As we go to press the gentleman from Utah is resting quietly. His wound is dressed, and the physicians report that within a few days he will be about again. Oliver Olds, the other victim, is probably beyond hope. The bullet has been located near the heart, but the risk of probing for it is pronounced so great as to be deemed inadvisable. A consultation of surgeons is being held. In the morning we will be able to give the result of their conference. Meanwhile, the authorities are leaving nothing undone to bring the criminals to justice.”

“Ah, my Nancy! my Nancy! that the stanchest heart that ever served a cause should be to-day at the mercy of your feet! Bear him on to the safety of the wilds far from the vengeance which men call justice.” I paused. Before me rose a house, large, elegant. About its gate many curious ones were loitering. I did not question; I had no need; I knew by my own dire intuition that this was Oliver Olds's. Within, the three ablest surgeons of the Slope were consulting. I leaned against the fence post; I was suddenly weak. They were passing sentence upon two men. On their verdict hung the life of Olds and the life of my friend, dear as a brother unto me; I stood mute in the hushed

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tension of suspense. The evening deepened, and the night drew on. The idlers one by one departed,—curiosity only had held them,—and I was left, a lone, anxious watcher at the gate.

Once each hour a man passed me, and, mounting the steps, knocked upon the door. He was Lingre, of the *Alta*. In muffled tones the servant conveyed to him the state of the patient, and he descended again. He came and went in the cold, matter-of-fact way of one interested solely in the journalistic aspect of the case. But ever as he came down I put the same fateful question, "Will he live?" and still as he passed he dropped me the same fateful answer, "No."

It was towards midnight that the three surgeons left the house. I dragged myself to them. For some moments I could not speak. But I realized that they were going, and I forced my faltering faculties. "You have given him up?" I asked, hoarsely.

"We had no choice," the leader said. "It was the heart." And I turned and crawled back to the hotel, and threw myself upon the bed.

I tried to lie there, to sleep and forget, but it was useless. The walls of my room seemed closing upon me like a prison; I was stifling; I was being crushed. So I rose and paced the floor till morning. Then I bathed my face, went down, snatched a morsel of food, and hurried out again. Through all the length of that weary day my thoughts hung steadfastly to the two doomed men. I walked the street, measuring the shortening hours of their respite, circling constantly back to the house where all day long the drawn curtains and muffled footsteps told of the sullen approach of the dread presence.

It was along in the late evening that, as I stood again my death-watch at the gate, I heard a noise as of a side door opening. Then there was borne to me a sound of commotion in the house. It continued for some time, and centred at last in the room where the victim lay. I strained to catch its meaning, but I could not. Presently it ceased; the front door opened, and a man with eager speed passed through it and started down the street. I put my hand out to detain him, but he dashed it off and hurried on. Presently he was back with a small box in his hand. It was an instrument-case. I leaped to him, and, clasping his arm,—

“For God’s sake,” I pleaded, “tell me! Is there a change? Is there yet a chance?”

And for my visible suffering he replied, breathlessly,—

“Yes; one—one chance. There’s a surgeon that’s going to probe. We can’t tell, but——”

He hurried within, leaving his sentence unfinished. And I went back to my place and waited through the darkness of another awful night. There was one dim hope yet for Couch,—one faint, far chance for my fugitive mate. And he, the man who stood almost without a peer in the field of surgery, by the grim mockery of fate must see his life hang on the knife of another. I peered against that curtained window with fixed, unblinking eyes.

“Oh, for the skill of the master-hand! Oh, for the genius of my outlaw! Another is cutting—he is cutting—he is cutting.” I said the words over and over. I put my hand up against my head. This suspense was becoming more than I could bear.

When next Lingre approached the door I dashed up beside him.

"The man is alive?" I asked. There was a hoarse unnaturalness in my voice that made them both turn.

"Yes," the nurse whispered; "he's alive. The surgeon's probed; he's got the ball. If he can rally the patient now he thinks he may pull him through."

And with a laugh that was half delirium I went and waited for the issue. With the dawn it came, and I knew that Couch was rescued.

## VII.

I went home, threw myself upon the bed again, and slept. I had stood guard at Oliver Olds's fence-post for two days and nights. I was exhausted, and I sank at once into that leaden unconsciousness wherein nature restores herself. When I woke it was light again, and I knew that I had slept through twenty-four unbroken hours, and that it was now next morning. I rose, bathed, rehabilitated myself, ate breakfast, and began to feel somewhat of the resurrected. I had thought of Couch and of Couch alone through these two miserable days. Now I stole a moment to wonder what had become of Hading. Had he made the hills? Had he succeeded in evading the posse?

I went into the office and picked up a paper. We were still furnishing the leaders for the day, and we were still, I must allow, very engaging reading. Couch remained the prime attraction, and I fancied that I read in the effusive gratulation over the remarkable rescue of Olds a lingering regret that the neck of the fascinating rebel had escaped the suasive embrace of the noose.

The route of the fugitives was traced with careful accuracy over unfrequented roads, through devious paths and by-ways. It was detailed with such satisfied as-

surance that I, who knew the bold natures of the men and the pedigree of the horses on whose fresh backs they had an hour's straight start, was convinced that both members of the company had thus far evaded the authorities.

I was leaning against the railing, finishing the article, when the clerk touched my shoulder, and, stepping to my box, passed me out a letter. It was a large official letter that almost burned my hand. In the suspense of my long anxiety the commercial interests of our detached firm had been for the time forgotten. The sight of this envelope brought back in a rush the realization of all the stakes that hung upon its contents. My partners were in flight before the wrath of criminal law. Would I on the morrow have to stand before our creditors and be crushed by civil process vicariously for the three? Oh, Couch, you embodied defiance of all methods! Why did we ever place ourselves at your mad guidance? But I forced myself to composure, retired to my room, locked the door, and, seating myself, tore open the envelope and read the message. It bore the printed heading of the City Hall. It was signed by the City Engineer; it was the formal acceptance of our bid. I tossed my hands up in delight. We had won. We were snatched as a brand from the burning. *I had saved—yes, I had saved—the Great Concern.*

The way was clear before me now; it needed only a little judicious management. I went down to the bank and explained to the director that the slight mishap which had scattered the members of our firm made it impossible to secure their signatures, hence that our large capital was temporarily tied up. As the contract was good collateral I had no difficulty in securing a loan

of five thousand dollars. This, I knew, would tide construction over till we got our first payment from the city. I went back to the hotel in the proud, happy consciousness of being at last a successful man.

I sat in my room that evening alone. I had much to think about. The last month had been one prolific of experiences to us. We had seen the West; we had almost succumbed to it. Whatever else the West was, it was not tame. Its surprises had a way of taking one by the throat that was effective, and its precipitancy was compelling. If we were to go on in our careers as eventfully as we had begun, we would come into rather more of life than we had bargained for. I could only hope that my compatriots would in prosperity become more staid than they had shown themselves as the free lances of disfranchised fortune.

As I sat there musing upon the new destinies that the last hour had opened before us, I thought I caught a sound in the adjoining chamber of a key inserted stealthily. That chamber was Hading's. I stepped to the door that led between. Yes, a pass-key was sliding in the lock, and the knob was turning cautiously. In a moment the door had swung, and the Chinaman entered, followed close by the very fugitive himself.

"Hading! You headstrong young rascal!" I began. "What did you venture back for?"

But he checked me with a finger on his lips.

"Soft, Harry, soft! Don't introduce me from the house-top!" But I dragged him over beside me.

"Sit down here, you precious criminal, and tell me where you've been, and how you came to come back, and—and everything."

"Well, I stayed away as long as I could. My money

gave out. I had either to make for Nevada or come back for—for my samples of soap."

I laughed aloud. I could laugh now; I was so genuinely happy that it all seemed funny and impersonal. And I drew from my pocket a handful of gold twenties.

"Help yourself, Hading," I said.

"Harry," he began, violently, "what have you been doing? I was afraid when I read that Couch had shot Olds you'd do something—something—rash—in your effort to save us. What have you done, Harry?"

I smiled a little maliciously.

"Well, nothing—fatally—rash. I put in the bid and got the contract. As we'd shot off all our competitors, I ventured to raise the margin twenty per cent."

He seized my hand with his quick, boyish impulsiveness, and his "Harry, you're a—a soldier!" had in it such a large approval that I forgot all the flings of outrageous fortune we had borne together in the West.

Presently Hading bethought him to inquire after the health of his late target. To which I replied,—

"Oh, they've patched him up. He left yesterday for Salt Lake. You will have to keep in hiding till the thing blows over and poor Couch's case is disposed of. Then you can come out and share the glories of the Great Concern."

"I'd like to know where Couch is," he mused, reflectively.

"The *Alta* says he's back of San José."

"Back of San José? I wonder what he went that way for?"

"Making for Gould's, probably," I said, slyly. But the thrust was lost upon Hading's anxiety.

"Poor wretch! they'll press him close if they get

him in sight. And I've a fear, Harry ; it haunts me. You know his fierce pride. I think there'll be more dead men before Couch's taken."

Then the Chinaman, who had remained settling some disorders in the room, observed, with the quiet stolidity that characterizes the race,—

"Sheliff no catchee Sabe Mucho."

There was an undertone of subtle conviction, and I looked up at him sharply.

"Why won't they catch him?" I asked.

But he relapsed immediately into his guarded uncommunicativeness.

"Oh, Sabe, he sabe mucho," he replied, evasively.

I had a suspicion that the fellow knew more than he was revealing.

"Do you know anything about Sabe?" I asked, straightly.

"No, no ; me no sabe."

He was so strongly assertive that I was sure he was lying. This heathen certainly had some information in regard to Couch's route which gave him a belief that the sheriff would not capture the fugitive. I had become somewhat familiar with Celestial traits since my advent upon the Slope. I drew from my pocket two five-dollar gold pieces.

"See, Ah Wah," I said ; "I'll give you those if you'll tell me which way Sabe Mucho went,—if you tell me where we can reach him."

He came over, took up the pieces, and clinked them against the table to test their ring. I saw the covetousness in his eyes.

"Sheliff man say gibe heap money catchee Sabe Mucho. You Sabe Mucho fliend?"

The renegade ! he thought us capable of betraying our own countryman for the price that was set upon his head.

"Sabe's friend, Wah? We're Sabe's brothers," I replied.

"Ah, you his bludders." He put the money down reluctantly. "Sabe, he sabe mucho. Ah Wah breakee arm ; Sabe make well ; Sabe Wah's fliend. Wah no sabe."

Of all the aggravating obstinacies I had yet encountered here was the worst. I was satisfied beyond all cavil that this pagan knew something of the outlaw's whereabouts. But how to draw it from him. I turned to Hading.

"Hading," I said, "I'd give the Great Concern itself if Couch could know that Olds is out of danger."

"So would I," he echoed, heartily.

And again I called the Chinaman.

"Ah Wah," I said, "I wish of you nothing that will be a risk to Sabe. His life is to us beyond price. Since you will not tell us where he is, I ask of you another thing. See, I raise the ten to fifteen. Will you carry a message yourself to Sabe Mucho?"

"Message—what dat is—message?"

"A piece of paper,—some writing ; that's a message."

"Lite papee?"

"Yes, write a paper."

"Flifteen dollar?"

"Yes, fifteen dollars."

"Sabe Mucho heap long way. Wah no pack papee ; Wah no time."

He folded his hands behind him. But he was stand-



ing close beside the table, and I set the three pieces together.

"There is no risk in taking a paper," I said, slowly. "If he is far I make it more. See, there's twenty." He took up the four pieces. How strong was the temptation the greed in his face made apparent. The balance was tipping; one piece more would weigh it to our side. I drew out another five. "See, Wah, that makes twenty-five for carrying a piece of paper. I give you one minute to decide." But he had yielded.

"All light! Wah pack papee Sabe Mucho," he said, gathering in the coin.

And I wrote hastily upon a hotel letterhead :

"The bullet is drawn; Olds is safe. Hading's got back. Do let us hear from you. HARRY."

An hour later we heard the same low turning of a pass-key in the lock, the door opened, and, with all the *sang-froid* possible, Couch walked in and seated himself in my best chair. We were both so completely petrified that we sat speechless. But our partner had lost none of his poise.

"Harry, you freak," he observed, as he helped himself to a cigar, "what did you give our last twenty-five dollars to that pagan for?"

I was so overcome by the daring of the fellow's presence and the audacity of his manner, that I quite overlooked his ingratitude.

"Couch," I said, humbly, "we'd have pledged anything, everything, to let you know that Olds was safe."

"Safe! Safe! Well, I reckon I ought to know it

if anybody does. If I ever cut to the breadth of a hair, it was after that bullet."

"You—you cut!" We both leaped to our feet.

"Well, who the devil did you suppose cut? What a precious pair you two are anyway! Do you think I was going to let those surgeons kill the fellow and I hang for it? Really, you don't flatter me."

"But, Couch! Couch!" I stammered. "It is so—so—sudden—so——"

"I beg your pardon, Harry," he said, in mock apology. "I ought, of course, to have announced it a week ago. Why, didn't Wah tell you? I sent to him for my instruments."

"But how did he let you operate?" Hading found voice at last to ask.

"Well, *he* didn't at first. You see, it was all a little irregular,—it had to be. I walked in through his window. The nurse had stepped into another room; I locked the door, and before they could effect an entrance I had it out with the patient. I proved to him very clearly that no one had the stake upon his life that I had. If he died, I hung. And at last he got together sense enough to see it my way. Now he is becomingly grateful. Why not? I saved his life."

This was all so in keeping with Couch's very insolence of cleverness that we had no comment left to make upon it; and the rascal smoked away with the virtuous complacency of a philanthropist.

"Really, Couch," Hading remarked at last, "you were born great. No one less than a genius could turn disaster into such unique victory."

"That's a fact," he said, with unblushing nonchalance, "and Olds agrees with you. Indeed, he is so

much impressed with my skill, and so indebted to me for his life, that he is going to erect a hospital for me. And this morning he named me in his will. I have now distinguished myself, and——”

I ended it for him,—

“And am out, serene, on the king’s highway.”

He gave a little shrug of acquiescence, and, laying his cigar upon the table, bent to me with his first genuine show of interest.

“But you boys,” he said; “how are you coming on? Did you put in the bid?”

“Yes,” I replied. “You fellows shot off two of the contractors; I managed to dispose of the last. As there were no competitors I raised the bid. The contract was to-day assigned to the Great Concern.”

And Couch rewarded me with the nearest approach to enthusiasm I had ever seen him indulge.

“Harry,” he said, “you’re an officer.”

He had raised on Hading’s indorsement. I bowed a military acknowledgment of the promotion.

It was along towards morning that Couch, under the escort of the Celestial, prepared to return to the victim who had become patient, patron, and providence. At the door he paused and called back to me,—

“Go down to-morrow, Harry, will you, and order the plate for my door. I shall move in next week.”

And there to-day you may read the name, “Renslow Couch, Surgeon.” But though surgery has remained his first love, he has never deserted the humble hand-maid through whom he wooed and won her. He is still a valued though a silent partner in the Great Concern.

## Inspiration at the Cross-Roads.

'TWAS in France, in the rocky border province of Bretagne, that along in the late afternoon of a summer day a man was walking listlessly through the broken stretch of forest that fringed the base of the low mountains. The trees in their scattered clumps were stunted of growth and scant of leafage, and seemed to shiver at every breath, as though conscious of the precarious hold of their roots upon the rock, and alert to an ever-threatened danger. There was no sweep of limbs, no soft entanglement of shade such as the name of forest conjures to our fancy ; only the gaunt, graceless products of a rugged soil.

One found himself drawn into a sort of pity for nature's poor effort at adornment here on the shelving foot-hills, and was half moved in his instinct of sympathy to turn away, as though somehow she must be sensitive to such an open failure. But no sentiment met him from the bald mountain slopes above ; no hint of gentle conscience from the arid plain beyond ; barren and bleak, even in their parched nakedness, they coveted no beauty but that of their own wild ruggedness and sandy desolation.

One wondered what charm lurked in the forbidding landscape that had availed to draw to such a spot a stranger ; for that the man idling through the wood was a stranger a glance attested. The carefully curled locks (it was still the days of the "Great King"), the per-

fumed hands, the shapely head, and the finely arched mouth,—these were the product of no hard or coarse surroundings. One might see such in the stocky, heavy-featured burghers of the town yonder,—far off on the edge of the plain,—men whom the stern conditions of the country had cramped and vulgarized.

They were full of quiet curiosity over the stranger, these burghers ; and what wonder, considering his person and his anomalous position. It was a question to their simple minds how the human body could adapt itself to such nice graces, but it was a problem deeper and more irritating how a man could live and be beyond the need for work. The citizens of H—— were not so dull but that they could appreciate these little inequalities of fortune, and it was perhaps no reproach that, behind the deference that his *état* commanded, there should exist a little envy of his more favored lot.

But their deference began gradually to lose its fine edge, and take on the blunting temper of a commoner courtesy. “For surely,” they had decided among themselves, “a man must be lacking somewhere if the only use he can make of his days is to scale crags and sit for hours against a ledge.”

They would probably have been committed to an open contempt, had they known that the young man was at all his pains and labors in the search of an inspiration. “Inspiration, forsooth ! there is need, God knows,” they would have argued, “for a third estate, if our ‘privileged class’ has come to this.”

To-day, however, the stranger seemed to be paying tribute to the practical, for suddenly he paused, and, drawing from his shoulder a gun, sighted it at something off in the distance. But he had been mistaken in

his hope ; the next moment, with an impatient oath, he lowered the weapon and sauntered on again.

And this man that had dropped down into the quiet community with his foreign aims and ways,—one owned to a little curiosity himself,—who was he? He had been silent as to his home and occupation, but he had given his name readily enough ; and to any people less isolated in interests and pursuits that name would have been history. At the capital men would have learned in shocked incredulity of a town so benighted as to be ignorant of their famous artist. Yet so it was ; Emile Rue had come to a district where his name had never been spoken. Since, however, that was what he had sought, the stranger was not likely to cavil.

Emile Rue was one of those heaven-touched men whose soul, lightly responsive to the world's moods, had yet its depths that no surface force can stir. He was a courtier, polished, gracious, suave, whose spirit of *camaraderie* dispelled the envy that his repute might have fostered ; but withal he possessed the quiet loyalty to truth that is the last attribute of genius. While the volatile public was lauding his name, and his inflamed followers were proclaiming him the greatest painter of his time, the man knew in his heart that he had never painted. He was a master of technique,—yes. He was great in design and clever in execution. But the soul that must glow from a picture, even as from a human face, he owned to himself that it was never there.

And yet he felt solemnly, beyond a doubt, that, under the right conditions, he could project his soul as well as his skill into his work. The failure was ever in the conditions. The conditions ! and to discover them. Every power of his mind had been set to the effort ; no

form of life was shunned ; no experience neglected ; from the brutal grossness of the *canaille* to the seductive witchery of royal dames, he tested all. But no influence had the magic to touch his sleeping soul. Ambition, honor, lust, love,—none availed to strike the latent fire.

With a chosen company, then, he left the town and journeyed, seeking in noted mart, by fabled stream, by famous Alp, that something which he could feel ; but the something remained unfelt. The artist was still not great.

It was in a last vain endeavor that Emile Rue had wandered off alone up here to far Bretagne. The dun peaks and the sterile plains had passed through his sight as forms ; they had quickened perception with their shapes and shades ; but both alike had been impotent, for the nerve of his spirit was untouched. It was small wonder that the man was irritated both with himself and with the world that refused to serve his purpose. He chafed under the consciousness of a power that his own will could not rouse,—of a genius that a foreign breath must vitalize. In the solitude of the previous evening, disappointed and exasperated, with many an execration of his ill luck, he had treated himself to reflections that were somewhat testy.

“ I have piped at the heels of inspiration long enough. I have been as a love-sick boy led on by a fickle jade, who shall turn yet, I’ll be sworn, and in my face flaunt her favor to another, and I, for my constancy, may take the livery of her fools. Oh, a rare good fool I am in truth, roaming the earth to find my soul. My soul ! I follow a phantom ; I chase a dream ; I have drained life to the lees : there is for me nothing more. To-morrow

I will return to Paris, and I will leave it again,—never.”

But a day intervened before the coming of the occasional coach that carried passengers from the drowsy outpost, and in default of anything better Emile Rue was riveting his resolve in a hunt. But here again he was unsuccessful. As he clambered down the steep in the full glare of the afternoon sun his gun rested on his shoulder full-primed as at the dawn, for not a shot had been discharged. Hot, tired, and disgusted, he struck across the patch of wood where, slackening his pace, he drew from his pocket a well-filled flask, swallowed a deep draught, and smacked his lips in the slow relish of a critic. Perhaps his despondency had reached a stage where it required blunting ; perhaps he had grown desperate in ill luck, or perhaps the fatigue of climbing necessitated a stimulant. Whatever the cause, the flask was carried to his lips with persistent regularity till it was drained. Then he threw it indifferently from the path and dawdled on.

The artist's mood was changed now ; he was exhilarated, he was merry, he was reckless. He trolled a snatch of an amorous ballad, and pledged eternal faith in imagined goblets to half a dozen fair ones in succession ; then, as a memory of his failure surged up, he wandered off into maudlin reproaches of fate, which broke at last into the vapid laugh of the inebriate. He staggered across the patch of woods out into the open highway, and with a kind of blind judgment followed it. It led him along for a time in a straight enough course, but at last he became dimly aware of complications. There were three roads now, each leading in a different direction, and he paused dazed. The confu-



sion, however, soon melted into contented indifference, and, mumbling an inarticulate "It's all one," he turned about, when he was brought suddenly face to face with one of the simple crucifixes which at that time adorned all the public ways. The people about were poor and uncultured ; their devotion could express itself only in the simplest forms, so the crucifix and its image were rude and misshapen. In the man's intoxication reverence, principle, decency even, were stifled ; but the æsthetic sense had lost none of its critical delicacy. The coarse, forlorn figure jarred on his fine sensibilities, and he saw in it only a hideous caricature of art. A moment he gazed in wrathful disgust, then breaking into a shout of drunken merriment,—

"I've raised game at last ! I've raised game at last !" he cried, and standing back he levelled his gun, and drove the bullets one after another into the body of the imaged Christ. At every charge the crucifix shivered ; at the last it broke, reeled, and fell to the ground.

"A rare bird now I'll have to carry home," the artist stuttered, as he dragged himself over to secure the prize. But the cross was heavy ; his exertion had spent his strength ; after a few vain tugs he aimed a kick at the rebellious wood, and, yielding to his drowsiness, threw himself down and slept. And there at his feet, in the dust of the cross-roads, lay the crucifix with its sorely-wounded Christ.

It was early in the morning that a wood-chopper, pausing for a quiet *pater noster* by the way, came upon the stranger still unconscious in sodden sleep. In the first shock of discovery the workman could only stand speechless at evidence of such accursed desecration ; then, in a very fanaticism of virtuous wrath, he hastened

back and roused the town to avenge the insult to the Lord.

The stranger's sleep had been dreamless ; no child, wearied with innocent play, could have lain in more untroubled rest. When he unclosed his eyes and shook off the torpor of his late debauch, he was being dragged along the highway amid a crowd of sturdy burghers, and all down the road from the town a stream of people was pouring out to meet him. The artist shot a wondering, incredulous glance before him, to the left, to the right ; then slowly he turned and looked behind. There, borne aloft by the excited mob, was a battered cross with its transfixed Saviour pierced and bullet-scarred. He stared at the image, and his lids quivered visibly. The rude, deformed thing was undergoing a miracle of change ; some weird fascination riveted his gaze, held his eyes dilated and his muscles tense. The lowering mien of the mob was lost to him, and their muttered threats ; he saw only the mutilated form and the dust-stained countenance of the Christ. Yet in it there was nothing of wrath, nothing of reproach even ; a troubled look in the tender eyes, a pathos of regret in the gentle smile,—that was all. Emile Rue turned hastily away ; his brain was throbbing, his blood was afire ; but turn where he would, the worn face with its miracle of expression was there, and he could not escape it.

As the artist was hustled through the narrow by-ways of the town, the self-appointed guard made light use of ceremony. "The idolater ! the aristocrat !" he caught the muttered sentiments of the crowd. "Idling all his days while honest men must work !" "Drinking up the substance of the poor !" "Making mockery of our

holy religion !” “What wonder the nobility is undoing France ! We will teach him, the wretch, what it is to violate the cross !”

The ejaculations tossed out from his attendants now convinced the artist that little formality would be wasted in the matter of his trial ; still it was incredible to the victim that his fate could be so speedily and so irrevocably sealed.

“The law,” the judge announced, with full solemnity, “is very clear in church and state on sacrilege, for sacrilege is an offence against both God and man. Some there are who sin in ignorance, and some are poor and break the law in want ; but here is neither ignorance nor want. The Providence that gives to some the privilege of rank adds to the rank duties. In them transgression is always doubly sin. The court decrees, therefore, that Emile Rue, being this day duly convicted of a heinous charge, shall take the law’s full sentence. For his sacrilege he shall serve out the extreme term,—five years at the galleys.”

This was the verdict of the court, which the listener heard as in a trance. Emile Rue’s dazed silence, his mental paralysis, slowly worked in the judge a realization of the man’s station and of what such sentence meant to him, and he was touched to pity. He had been himself, it was whispered, when in his cups, allured to trifling breaches, and he was moved to accord the stranger a privilege which was conceded here at the discretion of the court. Rising, he addressed the prisoner again.

“There is in our law a provision whereby the execution of a sentence may, for a year, be stayed, if the prisoner shall avouch on oath to return within the time and

yield himself for service. Emile Rue, you have had the law's justice ; do you ask its mercy ?”

And for the first time in his life the artist slowly bent the head of a petitioner.

So it was that Emile Rue, free, yet a convict, wended his way back to Paris, the world of his dreams and his achievements. The little settlement of H—— was too insignificant to have its doings chronicled ; no lips confronted him with the record of his shame ; no eye looked revulsion at his sin. Friends came as of old with ready flattery, and the gay capital opened its arms in welcome.

And the metropolis was unaltered. At the court moved the same spirit of revelry, keen for rumored intrigue and scandal ; the same *bonhomie* held the artist circles, the same frugal thrift the honest tradesman. Yet to the painter everything was changed. Paris, beloved Paris, had she ever seemed so fair ? The very beggars, with their quick wit and rollicking impudence so at variance with the turgid-blooded people he had left, grew suddenly dear to the doomed man. And the appreciative praise of his partisans, how he thirsted for it now ! “The strong conceptions, the skill, the art of the master ; the modesty and good-fellowship of the man,”—was this the Emile Rue whom, as a sotted, impious vandal, that court of boors had sentenced ? He was overwhelmed by the contradictions of his situation.

In a vague hope of reconciling them he threw himself into work again,—surely the past was but some hideous phantasm of sleep, out of which he would wake presently. He would work ; he would conquer and be great. And his companions nudged each other slyly.

"Ah, he is making ready for the king's prize ; he is painting for his spurs."

Such was the whisper running through the town, and in the artists' corner one graybeard chaffed another with,—

"Look well to your laurel, Maître ; Emile Rue has entered the lists, and, God wot, he may have found his inspiration."

It was a time of unusual excitement in the studios, for the "Great King," a munificent patron always of arts and letters, had offered this year, in addition to the accustomed prize, a decoration. To the victor he had engaged also that the successful picture should, at his direction, be purchased for the royal audience chamber. The clubs had, therefore, one theme, one aim,—the coveted title.

But the painter's *confrères* would have found little to fear had they penetrated to his atelier. The palette lay at hand and a frame stood against the easel, but no brush had touched the surface. The artist had grown unfit for work. Life had become to him a grim mockery. How could it be otherwise when a convict accepted homage ? He was distracted ; he was desperate, and in his desperation he sought alternately the table and the bowl.

"Emile Rue is going to the devil," Paris commented, and wondered. But though he might drug memory and bring surcease of thought, he could not banish the presence that accompanied him. No liquor could drown that face, and no oblivion could seal the sight that beheld it always.

Hypocrisy had become at last too burdensome for its victim. Up in distant Bretagne, through the long days

of the winter, a man might have been seen wandering aimlessly from town to town, creeping gradually nearer to the mountains. The days were like a slowly tightening cord that was drawing him irresistibly to his death,—for what but death could the galley be to him ! Every hour of his freedom had become precious, yet he was steadily shortening the radius of his circuit.

One evil he had escaped ; there was no need for deceit now. Emile Rue was back where his name brought him no hint of honor. But his deep unrest was not stilled, for outlined against the daylight and outlined against the dark rose the face he knew so well. At times the artist read in its grief his sin ; at times by some mystery of sympathy he saw reflected there only his own sorrow. And gradually, so strong was the influence of the presence, that it forced out all concern for the grand city he had left ; for the loathsome spot where he must die ; for the past ; for the future, and absorbed thought to itself.

Then it was, and then only, that the man realized his crime. He was full of the superstition reverence of his time, and his sacrilege began to assume to himself the enormity it had presented to the villagers. His sentence was forgotten, and hither and thither, in an agony of repentance now, he journeyed on, following a guide that he alone could see.

“ Ah,” a burgher observed to his neighbor one bright spring morning, “ that son of perdition has come back ; but what a *visage* he has got ! He is in too great a hurry to get that chain on his foot. I like him less than ever.”

But Emile Rue had not come to judgment. Five months remained of liberty. He entered quietly on his

old life, and betook himself again daily to the mountains. But he sat no longer against the ledge ; he was at work.

In the early summer, had any one taken the trouble to scale the height and glance across the artist's canvas, he would have found transferred to it the life-size figure of a man. His form was slight, as of one not fitted for heavy burdens, yet the burden had fallen to him, for he hung upon a cross. The head drooped aslant, and the eyes looked out upon something that was not disclosed. Yet one sought it instinctively in beholding the countenance. The agony of the death-struggle was there, but across it had struck a something that, even in that extremity, had power to lift the man out of himself,—to hush on his lips the groan of dissolution and melt his anguish into pity. On his mouth was a smile unutterably sad, and in his eyes the light of a voiceless petition. Below were the words of his prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and in the corner simply a name, "*Emile Rue.*"

He had painted now ; he had painted ;—but at what cost ! He had made immortal his own sin. In the face of the Christ he had set the seal of a grief bitterer than death, and that grief his own hand had wrought. He had found at last his inspiration ; in it the world might read forever—his shame.

Weary and exhausted the artist took his way down the mountain-side again. The glow of rapture that was wont to surge at thought of his awakened genius forgot to rise now. He was a master ; he was great, but he no longer cared.

It was dusky with gathering twilight as he crossed the forest, and twilight had deepened almost to dark as

he reached the highway. Then he came to the cross-roads,—the fatal cross-roads. He paused, and in unconscious expectancy glanced up. No, there was no image ; only the brooding sky with its faintly brooding stars. He stretched his hands, and groped ; somewhere, somewhere it must be, and he must clasp it. Then suddenly it came back to him ; he remembered it all, and, setting his picture erect against the base of the old crucifix, with a cry like a broken sob, Emile Rue threw himself in the dust and wept. He wept like one oppressed, and weeping prayed, not to be saved from man's sentence, to be spared earth's ignominy, but only to be forgiven, that from the face of the Lord he might wipe that haunting sorrow. In the fervor of his wrestling his strength was spent, and again, as once before, in the dust of the roads slept Emile Rue ; but to-night he was lying at the foot of the broken cross.

It was somewhere in the early dawn that he awoke, and was startled to see that in his picture was the crucifix,—the crucifix, but no Christ. He turned dismayed, and there bending over him was the Saviour he had painted,—the same frail form, the same broad, thoughtful brow, the same tremulous smile ; but lo ! the sadness had gone, and the countenance beamed with a peace deep, serene, perfect. For a long moment upon the penitent rested the Saviour's eyes, and slowly into the artist's soul there crept the same deep peace, and he whispered, " Lord, I thank thee, for thou hast brought me forgiveness."

When presently he arose and stood before the picture it was unchanged. The figure was there as he had painted it, but nothing could shake the knowledge that Christ had come or stir the peace of the pardon.



That day the painting was on its way to the capital ; the next, Emile Rue had delivered himself to justice. Right across the plain, within sight of the cross-roads where he had sinned, at the foot of the peak where he had wrought out greatness, a galley-slave was hewing stone for the public street of the burg of Bretagne. He was cheerful at his task, and worked with a smile quiet yet profound.

It was a month later that with loud heraldry into the town of H—— rode the king's messenger. He had come to hail in his sovereign's name the victor of a contest, and summon him to his reward. And calmly, from his place among the gang, the convict spoke his answer.

"Go, friend, and tell unto the king, your lord and mine, that no sword can make his victor knightly ; for Emile Rue is a felon, and in the galleys serves his just sentence."

With heraldry as loud the messenger rode back, but in the assembled court was silence as he spoke. The courtiers sought the monarch, and he,—a moment he looked down, then slowly he raised his eyes to where, across the royal chamber, hung the painting of the Christ. For a long time earnestly he viewed it ; then turning to his court and pointing up, "His work alone shall judge him," said the king.

They followed the royal hand, and in silence read the scroll : "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Gently to the messenger the monarch spoke again. "Go," he said, "and tell unto the convict, Emile Rue, that what his Saviour pardoned, that also doth his king. Bid him make speed to take his knightly sword."

And Emile Rue obeyed.

## The Black Shell.

WE were camped on the shore of the Euripus, a host of armed Greeks. From Sparta unto every town has sped the herald, bearing greeting and a summons to avenge the house of Atreus. In every agora sounded the call to war, and with fierce zeal we marshalled our bravest and sought the encampment of allies.

A multitude of warriors trod that sea-girt shore, each with its god-like leader : Agamemnon, king of men ; Peleus's son, Achilles ; the Ithacan of many wiles ; Ajax and Idomeneus.

I, Ilippus, had come down from bleak Enispe. Rough was our land, and scant of fare ; our skies foggy, our winds perpetual. From niggard nature hardly could we wrest subsistence, and our frames, spare and gaunt, bespoke us offspring of sterility. So, when the herald bore to our gates his call for men, we left to wives and aged sires our fields, a barren pledge, and came to make it fruitful in the sack of Troy.

I was the youngest leader in the host,—Ilippus, son of Tergamon. I came companion of Agapenor, who led the Arcadæ. My followers were few, but when we raised the war-cry and bore down many gave way before us, for we were fierce in fight.

We had come, we men of Arcady, unfurnished with ships. Our homes lay inland. We were ignorant of the sea. But Agamemnon had given us keels to cross

to Ilium. Through the days of waiting our peasant rowers at the benches trained their stroke, and when the order came, with slight skill of seamen, but full of trust in the gods, Enispe's levy thronged the galleys, sailing close behind that of the Pylian orator, Nestor.

The Argive fleet held its beaks straight set for Troy ; but ill chance bore us unawares upon the Mysian coast, where, at Tenthrania, we landed, and drove the helpless crowds like flocks before us. But learning our error, we embarked and headed again for the shores of the horse-taming Trojan.

As we sailed, lo ! a tattered cloud, a tangled fringe torn from some wind god's mantle. It floated idly towards us, errant harbinger of a mighty presence, sifting out now into a thin veil, now gathering again into fleecy eddies, coiling and uncoiling in white pretence of innocence. After it rolled a second, with the same friendly face, but less disguised, for here and there a shred of gray shot its hostile omen. And another and another came, in ever-weakening favor, till, at last, with bared intent, they swept their black defiance down the sky.

The sea, roused by the wind, shook herself. We felt her bosom rise and fall in quickening pulses. We saw the waves pile their flood and plunge like maddened steeds ; the waters were spurned like dust, and the froth was tossed from their foaming mouths in white jets of spray.

The other galleys, veering to meet the shocks, were scattered ; some were lost, most survived. But ours, under guidance of mountain men, were from the outset a pitiful prey. The wind lashed our prows, and drove us like hunted things. The waves snapped our oars,

and lifted us on sphering crests only to plunge us back into blacker hollows. Sail-stripped, rudderless, we tossed, while the waters gored our helpless ribs, and, rushing in, sucked us down to Pluto.

We swept past our destined landing, and were borne again towards Greece. The sea was strewn with wreckage,—spars, corselets, ox-hide shields,—and floating among them were men, struggling awhile, clutching at vacancy with agonized appeal, only to gasp in stifled gurgle, to toss wild hands of hopelessness, to stiffen and go down. Enispe had met a deadlier foe than Ilium.

When the Greeks collected galleys of the six crowded ships that held my followers, two only were left to bear the hopes of our hapless citadel. But now Telephus, a Mysian, joined us, who offered to pilot us across the Midland waste, and, mustering once more at Aulis, we made ready to cross again to Troy.

Through these days the skies smiled in gladness. The barren sea stretched one vast reach of blue, so still the hovering sea-birds beat their wings against it, deeming it but sky. The clouds lay along the glassy plain with untorn edges, trailed out like the floating robes of Naiads, and on the beach the fine, white ridges marked how faintly the sea-pulse stirred.

But now as we embarked, suddenly a gale arose, violent, adverse, and we left the ships and sought again our tents. Then Calchas, our seer, took the entrails to read therefrom the augury; and lo! it was direful. "Never shall the Thracian blasts be stilled," he said, "till the Virgin Artemis is appeased. She exacts the sacrifice vowed long since,—the death of Atreus's daughter."

Years before the king had pledged his child, but seeing how she grew in beauty, and with the artless wiles of winsome girlishness yoked herself the closer to his heart, he had forborne from yielding her to the knife. But now, with riotous outcry, the chiefs called for the death, and Agamemnon sent summons to his queen at distant Argos.

Again we waited, chafing at our vexed restraint, filling our long watches with talk of wars and idle tales. At last, to drive the lagging hours, we leaders held a strife of games, while close about the goal our followers pressed, with lusty shout straining each to victory. And once, when wrestling with Achilles, I bent him to the ground, even his Myrmidons raised a cheer "for rock-thewed Ilippus from bleak Enispe." But mimic contests soon grew dull, and we fell, instead, to sharpening the battle-axe and burnishing the armor.

Upon the day when daring to match Achilles I bent him to the ground,—though later he worsted me and won the prize,—at dusk a slave sought my presence bearing a tunic richly wrought about with threads of gold, and handed it, saying only, "To Ilippus, son of Tergamon, vanquished of Achilles, this robe from one who prizes valor."

I knew not who of the Achean maidens had sent such costly tribute. I knew only that her eye loved beauty and that her breast lodged a royal soul, for she crowned the daring of the vanquished. It pleased me, too, that she was modest and made no blazon of her name, so, regarding her reserve, I sent acknowledgment.

"Go, slave," I said, "and carry to thy mistress greeting from Enispe's king, and tell her that on the bloody plain of Ilium the valor she has prized shall

strike such mighty deeds as shall make Ilippus glorious. Then, returning the watchword of the Greeks, freighted with well-won pillage, will I seek her out, and—and—give her gift of Priam's treasury." So I closed aloud, but in my thought I closed,—“and make her queen in the rock-girt palace of my sires.”

The slave bowed low and quit my tent, and I in sudden mood rose and followed him. Against the sand my step fell noiselessly ; we wound and unwound, circling through the mazes of the tents. The slave moved onward, drawing ever farther from the sea, and soon a chance snap of twig or rustle of leaf warned me to better caution in my tread. I crept stealthily in his wake till he entered a grove,—the grove of Artemis. He paused now, peering close along the archway of the trees. But he sighted some one soon, for with a bound he cleared the space, and I drew after him ; and there amid the dusky shadows stood a maid of such majestic loveliness that I stepped away, deeming it the Virgin Artemis herself, and knowing how jealously she held her charms from the amorous eyes of men. But the slave spoke, and I, grown rash in wish for nearer view, crept from bole to bole, and stood within an arm's span of the two.

“Ilippus, by thy slave, sends greeting, mistress,” I heard him speak, low bending, “and bids me say that under Ilium's walls his valor shall do glorious deeds, worthy the praise thou hast bestowed. And on return, in token of his favor, will he deign to seek thee out and make thee payment in gift from Priam's treasury.”

With haughty grace I saw the maiden draw erect. “Make payment !” she said in wrath. “Payment ! with gift of pillage ! Doth the king hold me a Helot ? Me, that with my dower could buy his beggared Enispe !

What saidst thou, slave? Didst hurl his proffer back with fitting scorn?"

"No, mistress; I held my peace. Bethink thee how he won his name. No man am I surely to court a blow from Ilippus, rocky-thewed."

"Born of no woman art thou!" she spake, disdainfully. "If in thine arm there lacks the nerve that might defend my honor, in thy black heart there lacks the courage that would protect myself. Slave, doubly slave in being craven, I despise thee. Go!"

But he pleaded wofully.

"I pray thee, mistress, bear with me. In thy defence thou knowest I would yield my life. Be merciful. Bid me stay. I will die to shield thee." And she relented.

"Truly thou hast made mercy forfeit. But thou wast wont to prove a faithful dog, silent and willing. Therefore shall I pardon. Go, get thee afar, and speak not. My thought is troubled. I would be alone."

She had her meed of spirit, my fair maid, but that displeased me not. Better the fire, though flame doth sear the flesh, than spent ashes on the hearth of home. I watched her as she paced adown the grove, and, listening, learned the burden of her grief.

"And such is he, the base-born son of Tergamon,—the man of whom I thought through those long months when, in my distant home, I wove my seamless robe, striving, forsooth, how best to make it royal. Oh, nights, when through my dreams he walked robed in my purple! Oh, days, when I leaned breathlessly catching the far cadence of the sea! On it forever tossed my restless hope, the life of my mountain love, who sailed to luckless Mysia. And now I press again

thy strand, oh, Aulis! My eyes behold him, a hero among men, lordly as when he trod my sleep; but then he was a king, while now—oh, cruel, cruel!"

She stopped. Her head that bore its weight so proudly high fell, and her white throat trembled with a sob. At sight of it my caution left me. I forgot that the maiden was unknown. I cared only that she was rarely fair, and that my name had wrought disquiet in her heart. Stepping out,—

"And is he then so base, Ilippus?" I asked. The dusk concealed my face. She knew not who addressed her.

"And who art thou," she said, imperiously, "that here, here in my presence, hast hardihood to call Ilippus base?"

"Maiden, I did but echo thine own word."

"And if I called him base, dare not thou to echo it. Yet is he base," she murmured to herself.

"And why, fair Argive? Is it that taking at thy hands a royal favor he shall not send thee pledge by how much it is prized? Is it that since, lacking treasure, he cannot give such gift as fain he would, he must not win it in a glorious fight? What princely house is thine that spurns the glory of a warrior king? What maid art thou that thus disdains the goodly spoils of war?"

"I want not his spoils. I seek not his booty," she sadly said.

"Lady, Enispe's king hath little. No fat fields are his, or herds for hecatombs. The chill winds sweep his lands. In them is no hope. Therefore he is come to make his people rich in sack of towered Troy. Glory he has, and fair renown; but these thou canst not wear



like jewels round thy neck. Tell me, for thou hast grace rare as radiant Artemis, pleasing to my eyes and precious to my heart, tell me, what wilt thou that Tergamon's son can give?"

I stepped close, and slowly she swept her eyes to the full height of mine.

"Ilippus!" she gasped; "Ilippus!"

"Yes, Ilippus, son of Tergamon; cruel, base!"

"Cruel! Enispe, I mean it not. Base! I know thou art not base." Then, suddenly, "Thou hast been here. Thou hast heard? Thou hast heard?"

"Yea, lady, I have heard."

In pitiful confusion she thrust her hands before her face.

"Oh, how to thee," she stammered forth, "from whom I most would hide, have I betrayed my heart! Forget my words, Ilippus."

But I replied with vigor undisguised,—

"Speak not thou so, Argive. Sooner would I by the Scean gate die than let thee take again thy heart. Thou canst not take it; it is mine."

"Then keep it, great king," she said. "Much it hath dared in reaching to thy height. Forgive, forget, and let me go hence."

"Naught have I to forgive," I said. "Forget I shall not, and thou shalt go when now thou makest answer: What wouldst thou that Tergamon's son can give?"

Then slowly she sank and knelt against my feet, and, laying her soft hand pleadingly to mine,—

"One thing I ask, Ilippus, only one, yet that enfolds the whole of what thou art or ever shalt be. Give me, my king, thy love."

"By high Zeus, maiden, I swear it shall be thine, thine only, while I live," I said ; and on her brow I set the kiss that was my royal seal.

But at its pressure, lo ! she rose, and wrung her hands in passion of despair.

"Ah, guilty one ! What fury hath inspired me?" she cried out. "Thine evil fate am I, Ilippus, that draw down wrath in my desire."

I could not know the import of her words, and in hushed silence I waited. Then desolately she turned to me and sighed.

"Oh, why didst thou come, my friend, to woo the secret from my heart? Would I had loved thee still in silence. For now have I sinned against the gods, and against thee, for I have asked thy love, I, whom my father hath given to another."

"Mine thou art and mine thou shalt be," I replied. "Since unto me thy heart hath turned more and more fair thou growest, and I more fond. I yield thee unto no man. Hear me, beloved. I will do battle for thee. Openly, before the host of Greeks, in single fight, will I maintain my right, and thou shalt be the bride of him that wins."

But she threw about me greedily the protection of her arms.

"No, Ilippus, thou art mad. The man is mighty. Fight not thou with him. Before my eyes he will slay thee, and I shall die miserably. Ilippus, I entreat thee, wait. I will beseech my sire ; perchance he will hear me ; wait."

"And whose name bearest thou, Argive? Tell me, that I know whether he stand to me a friend or foe."

But she parried me.

"Oh, son of Tergamon, rash thou art as brave. Thou must not know his name. Oh, how through my love have I brought to thee this strife!"

"Thy love outweighs the strife on which it rides," I said. "I will wed thee though I war with every chief at Aulis. Tell me thy father's name, lady."

But clasping me,—

"Hear me, my king," she pleaded; "give me one day to beseech him. If then I fail, openly will I proclaim his name, and thou shalt add thy stronger prayer to mine. Wilt grant me a day?"

And I yielded.

"Ay, beloved one. To-morrow at the same watch will I come, and whether with consent or at the spear-point thou art mine. Then, till to-morrow, may Artemis guard thee. Fare thee well."

She turned away, and, beckoning her slave, passed from me, and was lost along the defiles of the trees.

## II.

The morning broke above our camp in sullen gloom. Once the sun looked down. It flashed along the metal of our helmets and our greaves; it glanced from the bosses of our shields, and spread our tents in gleaming folds of light. But in a moment it was withdrawn, and our spirits sank to the harsh disfavor of the day. In the early watch across the camp shot the word that Agamemnon's daughter had been brought. Her mother, Clytemnestra, had refused the maid, but Agamemnon, on ruse of wedding her with Achilles, had won consent, and now she rested in her father's tent.

Then spread a later word, how Achilles was very wroth at the deceit whereby his name was made a snare

to win the queen's consent, and now, though he denied himself as spouse, yet would he not permit the maiden's sacrifice. So Menelaus called the chiefs for secret council to demand the sailing of the fleet. And I, athirst for glory to feed the favor of my wooing, I hastened with the rest to the debate.

As I drew near the tent, a slave plucked my sleeve with,—

“Greeting to thee, son of Tergamon.”

I glanced, and knew the man who, in the eve before, had brought the broideder tunic.

“My mistress sends through me avowal of her favor, and doth entreat thee that straightway thou shalt seek her in the grove.”

“Carry to her, slave, the homage of Ilippus,” I replied, “and say that when the council ends I come. The chiefs are met in secret.”

“Ah, great king, she doth beseech thee come direct. She would whisper thee her father's name. She would take counsel of thee.”

And I replied,—

“I will halt but long enough to know the meeting's issue. Go, slave, bid her wait.”

Motioning the man away, I raised the door-fold and entered it.

The kings were ranged about, and bright-haired Menelaus, with ready speech, was voicing the discontent.

“Vainly, warriors,” he was saying, “by the waveless Aulis do we sit encamped watching our idle hulks, while safe behind the bulwark of the sea Idæan Paris holds his stolen bride. And the oaths that we swore to sack the city, of that man, Greek or Barbarian, whoe'er should

bear away the Argive Helen, are void,—the Trojan's jest. For by the word of Artemis shall the city stand unsacked except its fall be purchased by the blood of Agamemnon's daughter. Therefore must we decide whether we, the mighty leaders of the Greeks, shall exact the favoring breeze or here beside the sea disband, forsaking vengeance and the wealth of pillaged Troy."

When now he bade that each one pick his lot and drop it in the helmet,—the lot which named the maiden's fate,—I wavered. She was young, a bud of sweetest womanhood, too fair a thing to bear a victim's doom. But I thought of my slender force that Enispe with sternest sacrifice had armed; I thought of the bald heights of home; of ill-fed wives, whose mates, crossing the Acheron, had left to us their legacy of cares. Who would carry back to stricken Enispe the long list of her dead? Who would tell the tale of her brave sons, sent forth in vigor of hope, whose stark limbs made haunts for sea-birds on that grim Bœotian shore? I set my heart to cruelty, and when the Spartan counted out the lots that tipped the balance of the virgin's fate, lo! every one was black; Iphigenia's doom was death.

Then again we took a count who should carry the decree, and with sage speech persuade her father, and the task fell to Ulysses, the wily Ithacan.

As we left the council, again the slave plucked my robe.

"My mistress! my mistress! Great king, I do entreat thee haste."

For the man's warmth and for my love I moved with speed to follow him. But now we came upon Achilles, who, enraged at the leaders' treachery, had sworn to save the girl. And more we feared Achilles than the king.

"Hold close beside me, Ilippus," whispered the

Ithacan. "Mine is a perilous task. In thee is no disguise ; thy presence shall screen my purpose, and turn the suspicion of Achilles."

"I play no part of trickster," I replied. "If Peleus's son challenge thy errand, tell it him openly. Go thy way, seek out Agamemnon's tent, and try thy craft upon him."

But he pressed closer beside me.

"'Tis task enough, son of Tergamon, to force the king ; Achilles, we must lure by stratagem."

He held his grip upon my arm, and drew me with him. But the slave, falling at my feet upon the sand, clasped them, imploring me. And Ulysses, seeing me move to go, called out in vicious voice,—

"Who is this dog that thus would bar our way? Out, hound, or I will lash thee to thy feet!"

"Touch him not, Ithacan," I said. Then to the man,—

"Arise ; I follow thee."

"No, on my life," the other spake. "Achilles lingers ; thou shalt go with me."

And seeing him bent upon disguise, and hating guile, I left the slave, where still he lay against the sand, crossed by the straightest path to Agamemnon's tent, and raised the door-fold.

As we entered, the leader sat alone, brooding in silence. When first he learned from us that the allies exacted from him the fleet's release he bowed his head and sobbed his grief aloud. Yet Agamemnon was valourous ; he lusted for honor. It chafed him, too, to be held back from his foeman's frowning walls ; but his heart was bondsman to his daughter. So Ulysses chided him.

"Long ago, Atreus, should thy child have made payment of thy vow. Then would the miserable Argives have sailed, not languished here in weariness beside the ships. Thy efforts are vain ; the maiden shall not live, for the chiefs are bent to cross the sea, or, turning, to strike their wrath on thy very palace gates."

And I, too, burning with martial zeal, reproached him.

"Recall, king, the lost honor of thy house, the boast of perfumed Paris. Recall the glory of war and the fame that lies ambushed beside the flowing Scamander. And recount the Trojan women, Hecuba, Andromache, luckless Cassandra, whom we shall bear away in our curved beaks from conquered Ilium."

Thus we lulled the pain from Agamemnon's parting, and thus we set ambition to plot his daughter's death. And at last the king gave order that the sacrifice be done at noon.

Straightway I turned to where, low crouching, with his face against the ground, the slave had thrown himself ; but he no longer waited. With long strides I hastened then, thinking to overtake him ; but, though I took the closest path and sped on feet like wings, yet could I not come up with him. And when I reached the grove, and stood where was our trysting-place, lo ! all the spaces of the aisles were bare. My maiden, too, had gone.

Impatiently I paced the lone way of the wood, all eager now to know her name, and, if her sire allowed me for her spouse. Straightway would I wed, and Greece be doubly dear to fight for, holding my bride. But, though I waited long, she came not, and at last, heavy in heart, I betook myself again to the shore, and joined the mustered chiefs.

"Achilles has withdrawn his wrath," Ulysses whispered me. "Behold, they set the sheets upon our deep-prowed ships. The men stand ready to put off, for we sail with the passing of the sacrificial breath."

But I heeded him little, for my thought was in the tryst that I had broke. Soon, so soon, they called the watch of noon. An altar had been set within the grove,—that fateful grove of Artemis. The sea ebbd against the pebbles, seeming to send its low lament. From trees on all the circling heights came fitful sighs. The waves lapsed in broken strophes; even the wind, the sponsor of death, sobbed plaintively. They led her forth from her father's tent,—Iphigenia, the sacrifice. Her beauty was the praise of all the chiefs. Fairest of the Argives after Helen she was called. I knew it of report. I never had beheld her. Now I leaned forward, but the throng was dense and I could not see her face. Her discarded sandals left bare the smoothness of her feet. Her slender hands were locked resignedly, for at the last—'twas said within the hour—she had elected to be her country's ransom. Her loosened hair, bound only with the fillet, streamed about, hiding her from the gaze of the hosts of bearded men. The chorus of women raised the chant, and slowly they passed the stretch of sand, entered the grove, and stood beside the priest. Now Calchas, the seer, was old, and his sighs mingled with the maid's, as he poured the lustral water and placed upon her brow the sacred wreath.

I heard her put a question.

"Tell me, good Calchas, did the kings all vote my death?"

"Truly, daughter," he said.



"Bethink thee, good Calchas ; was there not one shell of white? Did not one king vote me life?"

"Not one, daughter," he said.

She made no moan. Unbidden, in silence, she laid herself upon the block, baring her white neck to the stroke. Her long hair shaded her face. She was looking out, turning her head to the muster of waiting ships. I forced my way among the crowd, and took my stand at the foot of the altar. As I came there the victim started, then I saw her shudder. I wore the purple tunic the slave had brought the night I wrestled with Achilles, and suddenly, now, I was seized with a thought of agony. This maid, who had sent such costly tribute to my valor, was she Agamemnon's daughter,—Iphigenia, the peerless Argive, whose death I had voted in the council, to whose sacrifice, with ambitious speech, I had urged the halting king?

I gazed in horror, for when the seer drew back the waving masses of her locks, there, upon that altar, lay the maid I had sworn to wed. And oh, thou pitiless Zeus, my heart froze, for, when the victim's eyes sought mine, out of them looked her soul, full of a pain all desolate, full of a love rapturous even in death. I tried to move, but could not. I reached to seize the blade ; my hand was numb. I stood like one of stone, while with a sweep the old priest raised the knife. We saw it—both, but neither spake a word. Across the silence, the last silence of time, there flashed a blade, and to the hilt the priest had buried it in her throat.

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Where flows the rolling Simois many Argives fell.  
But the Trojan spear brought death to none who loved  
it more than did Ilippus, Enispe's glory, Enispe's king.

## Taken in at Oare's.

### I.

"KATTIE!" I said.

"Katharine!" she corrected me.

"Oh! Katharine this morning, is it?"

"Katharine always," she announced, imperiously.

I smiled. This was one of her illusion days, evidently. She always had such when she finished a story,—days when she tricked herself out in her white gauze dress (a fantastic thing with fastenings of chenille), used book-words in her speech, wore a reserved, half-melancholy air, and was altogether a great lady. At such times she was Katharine Oare—with a salaam. But the dignities soon became strained. Katharine was a simple being. Some absurd incongruity or sordid detail would pierce the bubble of pretence and let her down into commonplace again. Then she was "Kattie,"—happy, lawless, lovely Kattie Oare.

They were a frontier family, the Oares. Old Judd (who was then young Judd) had started life as a farmer back in stony Vermont. But he was indolent, and his neighbors tinctured with the intolerance of superior thrift. He sold his exacting acres and moved to Michigan. Here, too, civilization took to setting its spirit-level upon him, and then to jostling him. He chilled under the low barometer of public disdain, and owned to himself, regretfully, that he must migrate or become

the social pariah. So he bent to the tyranny of sentiment, and joined an exodus to Missouri.

In Missouri the wanderer seemed for a time to have found the delectable mountain. Here was no pharisaic tribunal ; no burning at the stake of an impossible virtue ; a man had license to be himself. Judd Oare took root in Missouri like a native weed. He settled placidly into the bogs of shiftlessness, where alone he could bear a healthful blossom, and became the lazy, contented, worthless, good-natured, social being he continued to the end.

In Missouri he married (by some saving grace) a woman of a better frontier type : a worthy housewife, reverent of time-honored decencies, reverent above all of the master rights of man. However in her good soul she may have judged her husband, she had that chivalry of wisdom which held, in the very face of evidence, his irreproachable correctness. Failures were due to the perversity of things, never to Judd. Their poverty was the fatal legacy of drought, and rust, and locust, never of incapacity. She toiled from dawn to dark ; she sank with open eyes into the quicksand of want, and still, to the end, she held before her husband's defects, with a pathetic heroism, the screen of an assumed faith. But the weight of such an assumption as that of Judd Oare's respectability was more than mere flesh could sustain ; she fell at last, crushed by the weight of a phantom.

Just before her death Mrs. Oare had come into a small legacy, which she left now in trust for the two children,—Dorothy, the child of a previous marriage, and Katharine, Oare's own daughter.

In the months that followed the loss of his wife, Judd

was made unpleasantly aware that, even here, the family's status had rested upon the efforts of Mrs. Oare. Dorothy, though a small duplicate of her mother, and nursed upon the domestic myths, was yet too young to redeem the house, either by active thrift or wholesome pretence. The estimate of his family sank again to the level of the survivor,—poor, persecuted, unsanctified Judd ; shiftless, worthless, graceless Judd, left without a tatter of an illusion to drape about his character.

The descent was more than the harmless victim could bear. He had come to take himself at his wife's gauge, and beheld in Judd Oare "a citizen a bit slow," he was wont to allow, "but liable to come forred." Now the "liability," which had been imminent all his life, was made prematurely abortive. He had lost the power of startling the world by "coming forred," and had relapsed instead to the unthreatening safety of his native inertia.

The untimely blight of his promise lent a last despair to Judd's catastrophe. He gathered his effects, and, with a sad conviction of the world's injustice, took up his westward march again. He fled before the spectre of frugality. He was forced out by the cruelty of worth. Wherever society existed there was the censor of sentiment. He would journey this time beyond the reach of society, where he could be himself the "public," and make customs and set standards in grim reprisal upon new-comers. He sought, therefore, the remotest verge of the country, and settled upon Puget Sound.

This was in the good old times when merry legislators played catch-penny with the great Western domain, donating to each child its quarter section for the condescension of being born. Judd entered a mile for him-

self, a quarter for each member of his household, and bought the seven miles lying next. In the middle of the tract he built his house, a low, rambling structure, and opened court in the imperial capital of "Oare's Suttlemint."

"No one is liable to be elbowin' us here, leastwise," he observed to Lem Slack, his parasite, who, in view of the legacy of Mrs. Oare, had followed the fortunes of the worthy Judd.

"No, without they're asked," Slack responded. "But it's some quiet hereabouts, wouldn't you say? There isn't much a-doin' in these parts."

The dearth of "doin's" in the parts seemed to weigh with gathering oppression upon Slack, but Oare had not yet worn off the gloss of his freedom.

"There's doin's enough, since there's only us two to do," he said, curtly.

But Slack's smouldering discontent soon conveyed itself to the master, whose social instincts began to be sadly starved in his isolation. His arrow of requital seemed to have glanced off the target and recoiled upon the marksman. So at last, with wiser after-thought, he abandoned his vicarious vengeance.

"The suttlemint's grown all-fired dull," he allowed the day of his concession. "A citizen's liable to lose his spirits. There'd ought to be more humans nighabouts. We need men critters. We'd best keep an eye on the comers, and forage for neighbors."

So acute an eye did they keep upon the "comers" that before two months there were six squatters at the settlement, all divinely ordained to uphold the civic and domestic canons of the house of Oare.

"These parts are a-lookin' up," Judd observed, de-

lightly, to Slack. "But we're enough now. We don't want any stampede in ours. We've taken in six, and they're good, likely specimens,—a little halty, maybe, but all liable to come forred."

Such was the settlement for many years. These six worthies, some with families, some without, squatted on Judd's estate, tilled enough of the soil to supply the bald necessities, and lived their lives of sterile indigence. But the pliant founder was at last betrayed, and the catastrophe of separation befell the tribe. It occurred in this wise :

Among the squatters was one David Rullett, a man of some scholarship, with a passion for the adventurous, which he read with the most thrilling effect, and repeated afterward with ever-growing embellishment.

"At seven," Dorothy said, in giving me once an account of the regular evening's programme, "they used all to collect about our big kitchen fire. They gave over fetching the women folks ; for the women folks would fetch the childern, an' the childern would get skairt and all take to hollering when Dave Rullett got to the exciting parts, and the men allowed they lost half of the murders along of the noise. So they got to leaving the women folks to home.

"I used to be busy redding off the table and getting the things for morning. I never heeded their doings much, but Kattie, she just snuggled down before the fire and swallowed every word.

"Dave Rullett, he educated Kattie. Dad squared it up on heifers now and then, for he'd put money into stock when we first came west, and they were doubling up fast. Dave said he'd educate me, but it seemed like there was never any time. I quit at reading and vulgar

fractions, and left the education to Kattie. She took powerful to books ; and night's when Rullett's throat gave out—he'd got a touch of asthma—Kattie would take up the yarn wheresomever he dropped it, and read, eleganter than Dave a long ways.

"They used to sit lolling about, them men, list'ning to bear fights and Indians, and robbing pirates carrying off the beautifulest women, and they'd get so strung up they'd be leaning forred with their chairs tipped an' their eyes wide, the craziest lot of lunes you ever saw. But the craziest was Slack. He couldn't hold in no way. He always sided with the pirates, an' he'd sick them on to the navvies, and holler and storm about ; and when they were going under, along of the chief getting killed, he'd yell to them to come on ; he'd lead 'em, an' they'd clean out every navvy that sailed the high sea. But what fetched Slack worst was when the villain would make off with the woman. He'd just roll on the floor and gnash his teeth, and git up and stomp about, and curse and vow he'd have the sneak's life ; he'd quarter him ; he'd cut his throat and hang him to every tree in the suttlemint. The others would yell at him to stop his cavorting and give them a chance at the balance of the yarn, but it was no go. Slack had got to have his fit out. I never took to Slack, somehow. He was always sly.

"Now Dave Rullett had some schooling, but was good for nothing for all that. And his good-for-nothing ways wore on his wife terribly. I think half the reason he took to teaching our Kattie was so's he could hang up to our place and keep out of his wife's way. She was at him to take up a tract and let her and the boy work it so's they'd own something. But Dave he

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hankered after the suttlemint, and dad hated to lose him along of his power of yarning and his teaching Kattie. Kattie'd grown into a scholar, for dad every now and then gave them a heifer to buy books. So it was going hard to lose Rullett. But his wife never let up on him, and at last dad bought peace by deeding them a hundred and sixty acres off'n our best bottom land. That settled the Rulletts.

"Right off," Dorothy went on, "I noticed Slack took to getting sulky and wandering off alone across the suttlemint. The land round about was mostly taken up by this, for the gover'mint had shut down on the quarter-mile entries. Oare's was, of course, the best land, for dad had come first and got the pick.

"One day when I strayed out, walking farther'n usual off there on the ledge, I came onto a cut straight down along the face of the rock. I wondered some why dad was slicing there, but I forgot it when I got home, and asked no question. Right away off Slack began pestering dad to deed him a half-section.

"'I might 'a' owned the suttlemint myself,' he said, 'only I was a simple, and left it for you,'—though he hadn't a cent to hold him from starving when he come west, and he'd lived off us ever since we left Missouri. He went about telling how he'd worked for Judd Oare all these years, and Oare'd scooped in all the land for ten miles, till now we were rich as Jews and he was a pauper. His talking riled dad, so that at last he told him to pick out his tract wheresomever suited him, and Lem he lit square on the ledge off yonder, where I'd run onto the cut, and dad signed it over to him.

"The next week the news came they'd struck rich



coal on Slack's ledge, and it wasn't a month till the stampede set in to the suttlemint."

It was in consequence of the stampede that I chanced to be myself at Oare's. I was, by profession, a mining engineer, and had been sent some months previous to prospect the south mountains for coal. Now I received orders to cross and investigate the deposits in the neighborhood of the new find. As the winter was coming on, I looked about for some stopping-place which might serve as endurable head-quarters; but the outlook was unpromising.

"They've got room enough and grub enough at Oare's," an ex-squatter at last enlightened me, "if you could anyway get took in. But the old man's so knocked out along of strangers coming till the parts that he won't allow any one to set foot onto his acres, no way."

The verdict upon the desirability of my being "took in down to Oare's" was so general that I determined to hazard a trespass upon the forbidden acres, and one day, about noon, mounting my cayuse, I crossed the stretch of intervening wood, and rode boldly in at the unbarred gate. But no sooner had I ventured within the barrier than out of the very ground, apparently, sprang such a horde of dogs as I have never seen assembled before or since. Dogs of every size and breed, timber and temperament, scrambled over each other and dashed down upon me out of nowhere, barking and plunging and leaping up, now in the horse's teeth, now in his flanks, all in one clamorous protest against the intrusion. But fiercest of the pack were two slate-colored bulls, who, one on either side, with not a sound passing the paling of their bared teeth, stalked at even

pace beside me, the grimmest marshals that ever attended a forlorn culprit.

The possibility of being "took in" at Oare's became suddenly so alarming that my one impulse was to turn and flee for my life. But I dare not fillip with the purposes of the bulls. Their gleaming molars gave the frankest inducements for adopting their sentiments, and, as their line of direction signaled "advance," advance I did, without parley or deflection.

As I glanced up, I saw standing in the door-way of the house a woman, but she, like the bulls, surveyed me in silence, nor made any pretence of relieving my situation. I was directly in front of her, and had taken off my hat with my most propitiating salute, before she had the civility, in a low "To heel, Ingot!" and "Charge, Rinx!" to relieve me of my crew of yelping retainers.

"Is Mr. Oare at home?" I asked, when the cohort had retired.

"Dad's hunting," she replied, laconically.

"Will he return soon?"

"Dinner-time."

"Might I ask at what time you have dinner?"

"When dad gets here."

"Some time between now and night, I suppose?"

"Probably."

"I came upon business," I observed, "and as it's rather venturesome getting here,"—I was thinking of the bulls,— "I don't just like to go back without seeing him."

"You can wait if you choose," she said, indifferently.

"You can bide without, or you can come inside."

Her invitation was not what could be called pressing,

but I was desirous of seeing the inside of the house, so, dismounting, I secured the horse, and followed her.

## II.

The house in its interior was extremely clean and orderly. The table, upon which the dishes were set, was covered with a spotless cloth, while the steaming pot upon the stove gave forth an inviting savor which quite restored my desire to be "taken in." My hostess had withdrawn into complete disregard of my presence, and, in want of other employment, I took to studying her.

She was a woman of perhaps twenty-five,—I prefix a "perhaps" to what masculine induction can never raise above hypothesis,—rather undersized, rather heavy, but with a good, wholesome, cheery face, from which the hair was drawn back in a smooth defiance of unkemptness. Her calico frock fit her with a correct severity which fostered the same impression. Everything about her and about the interior bore a sort of quiet challenge to the disorder I had noted without.

I had been now for a year cut off from the presence of women, and this trim, thrifty housewife, with her silent ways, struck my practical sense pleasantly.

"You have a very comfortable place here," I hazarded, in conversation. "More roomy than we generally look for on the frontier."

"Yes, when the squatters first came they hadn't anywhere to stop till they'd get their shells up, so dad he added on two wings; and now the lot's gone, trailing after coal, and dad's all broke up, he's so lonesome."

"But there must be plenty at Slack's who would be glad to come down here."

"They're not dad's kind," she said, evasively. Dad's getting old, and he doesn't take to strangers. Besides——"

She was interrupted at "Besides" by the raucous amor which had assailed me at the gate. But it was lenced with an oath, and, remarking simply, "That's ad," the woman stepped out upon the porch.

As Judd Oare rode leisurely up to the house I had a chance to scrutinize him, and an unlikely subject he was, too. An old slouch hat was drawn over his iron-gray hair, which fell in disorder down his neck. He wore no vest nor coat, only a gray flannel shirt, across which the suspenders of his corduroy pantaloons shifted, dropping continually down his shoulders and requiring to be hitched again into position. He had a pair of low shoes, which fastened with buckles, but he seemed to have an antipathy to fastenings, for the shoes were unsecured, the buckles flapping against his ankles and making a continuous jingling as he advanced. In all the time I knew the Oares, the only occasions on which Judd's suspenders ever got tightened into place, or his shoes decorously buckled, were the days in which Kate became Katharine, and the whole Oare establishment was strained to a fantastic accordance with fiction.

As the autocrat reached the stoop, the woman observed,—

"There's a man here waiting. He wants to see you. He wants to see you on business."

"Business! A-buying that there ledge! A-movin' onto my land! Tell him Judd Oare hasn't got any land for sale, and he don't want the public any nigher than Slack's."

"He hain't said anything about the ledge," the

woman struck in, "and he don't look like the kind that would be moving onto a claim. He's dressed up. Like's not he's one of them gambler fellers they say's come to the suttlemint."

The prospect of seeing a "gambler feller" must have had allurements for Judd. He got off his horse with a semblance of alacrity, and, throwing the bridle over a post, entered the house.

"You are Mr. Oare?" I inquired, in my suavest. "I'm glad to know you. Let me introduce myself. I am Julian Furnam, an engineer from Slack's."

"An engineer!" he ejaculated. And I could read in the accent how much of a descent I had had from the interesting *personnel* of a "gambler feller" with which the woman had so gratuitously invested me.

"Yes, an engineer," I apologized. "And as I am to be some time in the neighborhood, I wanted headquarters where I might have quiet. Slack's is distracting."

I thought it might be best to echo his antipathy to Slack's.

"Slack's is—hell," he said,—a disposition of the subject which set it beyond the pale of further comfortable allusion.

"Your house seems so large—I thought possibly—perhaps—you might spare me a corner," I bungled.

"We don't run a public," he replied, tartly.

"No ; but in a case of distress, for a time—as an accommodation——"

The woman had stood while I was beating my way to negotiations, eying me critically, much as one might a prize steer, or a horse suspected of spavin. Now she delivered her opinion.

"He talks like a scholar, some. He might do to teach Kattie, since Rullett's vamoosed."

"Kattie don't need any more teachin'; she knows enough," Oare retorted.

"She's powerful pestered about them sums. And I heard her wondering if Naples was in France, or—or—somewhere's else. And she can't wait nohow, she says, for Rullett to tell her what become of Amy—Amy—somebody; I forget who. She misses Dave awfully."

"She knows enough," he insisted.

"She'd ought to have a chance for education. None of the rest of us knows anything. She'd ought to be let tell if she's ready to quit or if the engineer'll serve for Dave. He comes along handy. He can have Rullett's quarters, and I'll do for him if Kattie wants more learning."

"Don't want any engineers about."

"You'd best let Kattie say. She'll be uncomfortably mad if he's sacked without her being asked."

"That's a fact. That's a fact," Judd repeated, reflectively. "She'll be powerful oncomf'table mad. She'll best be let have her say. Well," he addressed me, "draw up and stow in yer dinner, and when Kattie comes we'll pass on you."

Who Kattie might be I was left to conjecture. I inferred that she was a girl; that she had a violent temper, and that she was in dire need of instruction. Some uncouth young vixen, whose ears I should be tempted to box and who would retaliate by biting me, most likely,—the typical, shock-headed, large-mouthed, knob-knuckled, pugnacious little cub of the frontier. A nice situation I was in, waiting to be "passed upon," probably "sacked," by such a specimen.

The calmness with which the family assumed my readiness to fill the office of pedagogue nettled me. I, Julian Furnam, honorary graduate of the first institute in the land, with the pretensions of three generations of Furnams centred upon me,—I, tutor to some oaf of a girl, the daughter of old Judd Oare! Really, the idea was too preposterous. My pique passed in the humor of the thing. Besides, the dinner smoking hot, and redolent of good savors, tempered my pride. I could sit under the imputation of pedagogue till I had gratified my appetite, when I could demur with less violence to taste. I drew my chair close to the table and applied myself with full relish.

"Where'd you leave Kattie?" the woman asked, as Judd seated himself.

"She allowed she'd ride down to the river and have a jab at a salmon, being as we hadn't trailed anything."

"And you let her? Onto that plank again? Dad Oare, mind my word, that child'll lose her life there yet."

Judd met this warning with a shrug in which his pride was manifest.

"I can't keep her off'n the plank. I didn't pack the plank down there. I didn't set her to jabbing salmon."

"Dad! Dad! No one can teeter there long. Kattie'll try it once too often."

"Nothing won't happen to Kattie," Judd said, with the fond assurance of paternal admiration. "She's as slick-footed as a panther. Let Kattie alone."

Old Oare, despite his grudge against Slack's, was consumed with interest over the happenings there, and, between his questions and my reports, two hours or

more passed unnoted. The woman's uneasiness increased steadily. At the slightest sound she hastened to door or window, only to return again. At last she could bear the suspense no longer.

"Dad," she said, coaxingly, "Baldy's rested up, and he's emptied his oats; why wouldn't you ride across to the river and send Kattie home? Her dinner won't be fit for a siwash with standing."

"Is it the dinner or the plank that's worritin' you, Dorothy? I won't get any peace, I s'pose, till Kattie's planted afore your eyes, so I might as well go. You can ride along if you'd want, Mr. Engineer. Mebbe you ain't seen the rapids?"

"I will go, certainly," I said.

I had some curiosity to see this oaf of a girl, whom, it was inferred, I was so ready to teach. Besides which, I was pleased with a semblance of tolerance on the part of my host.

We rode for perhaps half an hour, when we reined in upon the bluff that here walled the river. It was scarcely more than a hundred feet across, the water plunging down the rocky gorge in a succession of rapids, whose contending eddies frothed and seethed in riotous commotion.

The autumn sun, swinging low, passed musingly along the unpeopled stretches, entered the pass, and hung above the stream. This wrestling, this rivalry of force, it jarred upon the rest of the mellow day; it broke the spell of gladness that reigned aloft in amber sheen of cloud, that reigned beneath in browsing shadow; it filled the air with discord.

Softly the sun steeped down along the sandstone wall. The birth-blue was warped and dull. It lit it again to



the fresh hues of youth, and the bleared front, wrinkled in rain-ruts, worn by lashing winds, seared to the dun yellow of dissolving age, flushed to a golden vigor which masked awhile its ravage and decay.

And when, descending still, the sun with chiding smile laid its hand across the flood, lo ! here, too, all was changed. The tumbling waste made cataracts of light, the eddies gleamed in frosted wells, and the misty spray arched the ribbed gorge with myriad shifting rainbows. The waters, forsaking their feud, danced along their rocky bed, the breath of the day had touched them, and the voice of strife was hushed in the rippled song of peace.

My first glance, as we halted on the bluff, was at the scarred wall, the jagged crags that lined the narrow way. Then my eye wandered to the shifting tints the sun was baring everywhere, then to the plunging waterfalls. But, as I studied them, my sight was suddenly caught by a vision which held it in shuddering fascination.

Braced in a fracture of the cliff, and stretching out over the stream, was a plank that dipped and bent above the boiling waters, swaying to every movement of a young girl, who, standing on its outmost point, in total oblivion to her peril, peered into the hissing flood as calmly as though she hung above some harmless brook-let of the plain.

That she was a girl I surmised alone from her coronal wealth of curls,—her attire would certainly not have disclosed it. She was dressed in a coarse mottled flannel waist and trousers. The blouse was open at the throat, and belted with a wide belt of leather. On her feet were a pair of boy's rubber boots, close fitting, the tops of which were drawn snugly over the trousers and

protected them from the spray, whose film, tossed lightly up, caught the sunbeams, and spangled her from hair to feet with gems that pulsed like stars.

I have wished so often that in immortal remembrance, upon the canvas of some gifted artist, might be preserved my first vision of Kattie Oare. Nowhere could be more fittingly embodied the ideal of our West, our young, rude, glorious West, than in this girl, the spirit of the gorge.

She stood in an attitude of rapt absorption, following breathlessly the movements of something in the stream. Her figure was drawn up, alert to strike. Her upraised arm held its spear aslant, poised for the blow. She stood out against the glinting sunshine through one long moment of suspense; then, swift as thought, the spear shot across the space and pierced the water. Had she hit? It took the surest aim, the keenest skill. I bent with straining eyes. A pause,—the spear-head rose again, it quivered and throbbed and plunged. With a glad cry the young girl drew it back, and, as she raised it, lo! impaled upon its point hung the writhing, sparkling salmon.

Seizing her prize she turned, and lightly, as though she trod a field-path, tripped along the perilous plank, bounded from jutting rock to rock, climbed with agile feet the slippery wall, and stood upon the bluff. Then she caught sight of her father, and, raising the shining captive for his inspection and admiration, observed,—

“She’s a beauty, dad. She’ll weigh twenty pounds, I’m sure of it. I landed two others, but they were dog, so I flung them back. You didn’t tell Dor where I was, I hope. Dor fusses so.”

“Dor sent me after you,—said the dinner was spoilin’. You’d best get up your hat there and come along.”

Kattie moved aside a few rods, and picked up her powder-pouch, whose strap she slung across her shoulder, and her gray sombrero, which she set carelessly upon her head.

I wonder that I remember the incidents. I was certainly not heeding them. I was too much absorbed in looking at her. That sombrero shaded the freshest girlish face I had ever seen. As she turned to mount her horse she was brought abruptly before me ; only then was she made aware of my presence. In the first instant of meeting neither spoke. She was silent by surprise, and I by the difficulty of adapting my salutation to the person and the emergency. But I rallied my manners, bowed lightly, familiarly I fear (she was such a child), and spoke her name, "Kattie."

She swept a slow, deliberate glance the stretch of my full six feet of Furnam, drew herself back with the dignity of a duchess, and announced, frigidly,—

"Miss Katharine."

It needed all my self-control to restrain my mirth. This minx, whose sex was alone attested by her coronet of curls, whose world was rounded by the radius of Oare's settlement, to arrogate the airs of a metropolitan belle, and exact the tribute of "Miss Katharine !" I believe my amusement must have betrayed itself, for with a whisk she passed me, and at one light bound mounted her horse and set off alone for home.

She lingered in the yard long enough to take off the saddle and set for the horse its measure of oats ; so I was already within the house when she entered.

"Well, Kattie, and you ain't drowned?" Dorothy inquired, as the vagrant appeared. "I always look to see you fetched home drowned from that river."

"Maybe you'd better tether me out in the yard. I'd be safe then," her sister replied, disdainfully.

"Come, child, sit right down and have your dinner," Dorothy said, soothingly. "You must be wore out for food."

"When I get on my frock," the other answered.

"Your frock! Ain't you all right as you are?"

"No," she said, shortly; "I ain't."

She glowered at me from under her curled lashes, and Dorothy's eyes, following hers, caught the gleam of hostility. But, despite the double fusilade, I could not mask my smile. That fiery little savage in her rubber boots and leather belt, whose boyish costume had betrayed me into the *camarade* familiarity which her girl's pride resented,—really she was bewitching. Dorothy seemed to read the situation, for she laughed slyly as she remarked,—

"I guess maybe you had best take off your boots, Katharine. They're some muddled."

Miss Katharine withdrew, but in a very few minutes she had reappeared, and I will concede the girl had fair excuse for her resentment. She had looked in her riding-costume so small that my salute had perforce a touch of patronage. In her proper attire she appeared, as she really was, tall beyond the average, and though the fluffy hair that fell about her forehead and neck gave a babyish softness to her face, I judged her to be fully twenty.

As I looked from Judd Oare to his daughter I was struck with how narrowly Kattie had escaped some of her father's defects. Had her clustering hair been like his, straight, its wayward charm must have become common dishevelment. Had her slender figure not had

firmness in its pliancy, the loose folds of her dress must have accented the doubtful outline. Now they hinted only freedom, ease, the play of muscles, elastic strength. Her brown hands had no labor lines like honest Dorothy's. I suspected that Judd's obliquity to toil had become a congenital slant in "Miss Katharine."

### III.

The young girl seated herself at the table now, and Dorothy, hoping to improve sentiments by starting our acquaintance afresh, introduced me.

"Katharine, this here's Mr. Furnam, an engineer from Slack's."

Katharine bowed distantly.

"He wants to come and live with us, but dad don't hinge to the notion. I thought how's you might favor his being taken on instead of Dave, seeing you were so hard drove along of Naples and that there Amy. I agreed I'd do for him, if you wanted him taken on. We kept him here till you'd get back before settling him."

My pique and irritation returned in full vigor. To be "taken on instead of Dave" was a form of disposal too galling to Furnam vanity, and to be "settled" by this arrogant young border miss—I pushed my chair back squarely against the wall, and was about to express myself in forcible terms regarding—well, the climate, perhaps, or timber, when I chanced to glance at Kattie. The reserve and hostility had all vanished. Across her eyes was passing a look of mischievous mirth, and in a moment she had broken into the most provoking, delicious, girlish laugh imaginable. She

had caught the humor, the imbecility of my position, and was enjoying my discomfiture openly.

"You think you would enjoy teaching?" she asked, archly. "I'm very stupid. Besides, I won't study anything I don't like, and I like only very few things. Rullett said it took stores of patience to educate me."

"And I have no patience," I announced, severely.

"But you might get some—in time," she said, with teasing encouragement. "Rullett did. You've had some schooling, haven't you?" she asked, more seriously. "You think you could trust yourself on triangles? I'm on triangles now."

"I might, I suppose, by brushing up," I answered, cynically. I was in an exasperating position. My title of engineer was clearly no certificate here. My "parts" must vindicate themselves in open tourney. I was nettled into self-display, yet I was held back lest an exhibit of "schooling" might be construed into a bid for Dave's "vamoosed" office.

"Will you show me why the two obliques equal a right?" Kattie asked, presently. The request was made with hesitation, and I was silent. Was she quizzing me for revenge? for torment? Or was she really in trouble over what Dorothy had called her sums? I had noted the studied accuracy of her sentences in speaking to me; now, as I looked in her face, I saw passing over it a blush,—the embarrassed blush of ignorance. Poor child! I drew out a pencil, and, pushing aside a plate, set to work to verify the simple theorem.

"'Tisn't the way it's done in the book," she said, diffidently. She was convinced, but seemed to suspect jugglery. "'Tisn't the way in the book."

"Probably not, but each one's way is the best for himself," I said, smiling.

She was thoughtful a moment, her mind weighing my statement with the solemnity one might bring to the proverb of a sage.

"That's just it," she said at last, in delight. "No one ever made it plain before. You see, now, Dor, it's all right that I'm not like you, for my way's best for me, as your way's best for you."

Dorothy concurred: "Of course, your way's best for you, child."

"Will you tell me now about—about——" Kattie hesitated, but Dorothy came to the rescue.

"She wants to know what become of that there Amy Dave was telling about."

"No, Dor."

The young girl lacked yet the hardihood to avow her supreme interest in Amy. This was something which she held evidently a trifle unwomanly, and over which she was showing a shyness as quaint as it was amusing.

"I want to know about—let me see—Jane Grey. Lady Jane Grey."

I was being inveigled into tutorship. But this girl, who followed every word with the warmth of her whole being, whose soul hung balanced in her eyes, was quite unlike the traditional pupil.

I gave the biography of luckless Jane Grey to the best of my remembrance, but all the time I was running my mental eye down the records of history for the Amy that was exercising her. Suddenly I had a divination. It was not likely she would have reserve or bashfulness over a character in history; it must be in romance, and in romance there was just one Amy. As I closed the

career of Jane Grey, I said, "Our most vivid pictures of bygone times come oftener, I fancy, from fiction than from history. In one of Scott's, now, there is a character you would enjoy, an Amy, too,—Amy Robsart."

Simple daughter of the wilds! She was as transparent as the mountain brook. She leaned down against the cleared table, propped her head on her hand, and in an undertone, tense with suppressed desire, gasped, "Yes, Amy, Amy Robsart——"

I said before that I had been shut off from the world, ransacking the mountains for a year. This was the first semblance of a home, and these the first civilized women that had refreshed my sight since I and my party had crossed the Columbia. Now, as Kattie sat bending forward, her brown hand was buried in her hair, whose soft tendrils crept about her white arm, from which the loose sleeve had fallen back. Her eyes were fastened upon my face with the ingenuous interest and admiration which only an unworldly nature would betray.

To some men admiration may, from familiarity, have lost its charm. I was not handsome, I was not clever, I had not become inured to flattery. Indeed, I do not think I had ever been privileged to feel the subtle intoxication till this day, when I sat watching the unconscious lights in Kattie Oare's eyes. My *blasé* critic will, from his callous height, look disdain upon my susceptibility, but let any man recall the first time that across his soul flashed the flattery of a woman's admiration, and, if in the recognition there was no thrill of pleasure, no sudden warming of his being, no reciprocative esteem,—well, he is either more or less a man than Julian Furnam.



During a pause in my recital I heard Dorothy observe to old Oare,—

“Kattie’ll be favorable to his sticking. He’s got the gift of yarning almost equal to Rullett.”

“No,” objected Judd. “He’s more book-like, but he hasn’t Dave’s fire. Dave was worth ten on him at workin’ you up.”

It was almost absurd, perhaps, but after that comparison I hated Dave Rullett. To have unwittingly pitted myself against the vagrant in a contest of story-telling and have come out second best, be judged bookish and lacking in dramatic fire, was the very dregs of humiliation. How instinctively my humbled egotism turned to the favor, showing with such childish candor, in the face of Kattie. Her partisanship was like balm, and when, as I finished, she leaned back slowly and murmured, “Poor Amy,” I own I was jealous that the heroine had filched any jot of the interest I wanted for myself. But she soothed me, for, as I rose to go, she said, looking down,—

“I wish you would come and live with us. I would be as unstupid as I could, and, maybe—maybe—after a while you could get patient.”

Yes, a fellow could—maybe—after a while—afford to “get patient” teaching her, pretty thing. Despite the supercilious disdain that had marked my mental attitude an hour ago, the comfort of the house, the excellence of the dinner, and, above all, the winsome grace of Oare’s youngest daughter, had almost won me to the atrocity of being “taken on instead of Dave.”

“You want me to teach you?” I asked the girl.

“Yes, very much.”

“And you will let me select the studies?”

"Yes."

"And you won't get rebellious?"

She looked at me a moment, shyly ; then the bright, mischievous twinkle rose to her eyes again.

"I know," she said, "you're going to put me onto squares and cubes, and cut me off'n stories."

I laughed outright at the quickness of her intuition.

"Yes, we'll go into squares and cubes," I confessed.

"And can't I have any stories—ever? Once in a long while," she pleaded ; "once a week, once a month? I'll just starve on none."

"Well, once in a long while, perhaps. But I don't approve of the influence of romance upon young—I was about to say feminine minds. It makes them sentimental."

I could see the diffidence creeping back into her manner, as though I had convicted her of some unlawful taste.

"Within limits classic novels are allowable," I said. I must not be too vigorously masculine. "But novels are the food of women whose temperament is least fitted to withstand their treacherous effects. We shall lay a firm, practical basis in squares and cubes."

"Yes," she said, demurely. I fancied that a smile flickered a moment in the corners of her mouth, but I must have been mistaken, for her eyes had the fullest submission.

Within a week I was domiciled at Oare's, and had begun the training of Miss Kattie. Now, I have very positive theories of education, and hold of first moment the influence of mathematics. So I set my pupil straightway to a course of abstract reasoning,—formulae and deduction. We started on bald heights heroically.

But to my deep disgrace I am forced to own that by some wizardry, inexplicable then, equally inexplicable now, before two months had passed I had so betrayed my principles that every night, at the end of my task, I was telling that girl a story. How I had fallen I do not know ; it was by accident, surely. And how, having fallen once, I could deliberately repeat the accident, is a more perplexing puzzle. But there I was, nightly, with my chair drawn away from the table, and there was Kattie, just as in Rullett's days, ensconced in her low seat before the fire, her hands clasped against her knee, her small, slippered feet crossed, and the firelight sifting through the meshes of her hair,—an enticing picture of absorbed concern. At first I told the stories solely, I think, to relax her mind from the tension of involved thought. But when, in her deepening interest, she used to turn her face from the flaming pine-knots, following me breathlessly, locking and unlocking her brown hands in the suspense, the newness of feeling myself the centre of anxiety, of seeing the tumult of her tremulous little soul, spending itself upon my words, held me with a strange fascination. To be part of romance to this young girl—what was becoming of my practical, work-world sense?

I owned to myself now that, if I was not in love, I had the most treacherous symptoms that ever tricked a mortal. I began to study my companion with a solicitude not demonstrably linked to cubes, with emotions whose roots were not to be extracted upon paper. Had Kattie's interest, too, a personal quality, or was I to her only another Rullett, a ready story-grinder? I had more mental upheavals in those months at Oare's settlement than I had experienced in the whole thirty

years of my previous rather volcanic existence. Through the days when, by chance, I came upon Kattie about the house or in the fields, she was a being of variables. Sometimes she greeted me with barren form. Sometimes she welcomed me. Sometimes she blushed, and then stalked away in such a towering rage with herself that I was hopeful ; but at night, while I wove my fictions by the fireside, her eyes, even when straightly they met mine, had in them an unconscious aloofness, an abstraction that was discouraging. Did she look beyond me to a drama of which I was creator, but of which I was not a part? Was I, big, burly, graceless creature, tolerable to the monotony of her real life, too gross for the rarer atmosphere of romance? I grew to believe so more and more, for, on the days when, as "Miss Katharine," she withdrew to the realm of dreams, I was left, with the rest of the household, to the unidealized anchorage of the actual.

I may have grown ridiculously sentimental, but "Miss Katharine's" isolations had become my unbearable grievance. She dressed herself always in the same flowing, fleecy gown of white, which seemed to satisfy the requirements of every age, character, and station. The long train swept the bare floor with a royal disdain of dust, and the massive bracelets upon her shapely arms had in their alloy no base to cheapen her complacency.

The fervor of childish imagination that could toss off the shackles of the real, and in such trappings float away to courts and enchanted palaces, was a unique attribute. To my prosy, practical mind it was altogether the quaintest faculty I had met, and with due selfishness I was jealous.

It was all well that she should flit amid storied groves if in her fancy I was beside her ; that she should be princess in royal halls if I was always attendant prince. But this having to remain plain, unheroic Julian Furnam, while Miss Katharine starred the empyrean with unchallengeable knights, was gall and wormwood. I loved the tantalizing creature. I wanted her. I knew that, wherever destiny might call me, my heart would seek her with desire unceasing. And yet, to ask her for my wife ! To be life's prose to her always,—a fact, dull, dry, commonplace ; a memory laid aside while her soul eased its cramped wings in soaring. Had I any right to marry her ? Yet when, in her rides or walks, we met, she was at times so strangely responsive to my hopes that I was lured to sophistry, and determined at last to hazard her happiness and secure my own.

The day after I had resolved to venture a proposal, I came upon Kattie on the rugged bluff that marked the limit of her father's land. She had left her horse grazing among the rocks, and sat now upon a ledge that overlooked the open country. She wore the riding-suit in which I had first seen her, and which seemed yet to license a familiarity and comradeship which her dresses discountenanced.

"Good-morning. Have you sighted anything?" I asked, as I dropped casually down beside her.

"No, nothing ; nothing, that is, but you. You're the first live thing I've seen."

"And I'm very poor game."

"Too close besides—no range. I hate to aim where there's no odds against me."

"Umph ! You think me unworthy of your skill ? Too sure a drop, eh ?"

She knew that she was dear to me, the little elf, but at the covert meaning she looked up with assumed unconsciousness. It was the first coquetry I had ever seen in her,—that feminine impulse to toy with a victim which comes with the conviction that the victim is secure.

"I should never try my aim upon you," she said. "I'd be afraid my game would prove bigger than I thought for,—a bear, or a lion, that I wouldn't know how to manage. I might end by being the game myself."

She stood beside me, looking down, archly alert, as though fearful of my possible change. In the attitude, half timid, half daring, she was like some venturesome wild thing from the neighboring forest. I rose slowly and faced her.

"Your ball has pierced the lion's heart," I said, solemnly. "He can never be formidable to you. Would that my aim was as sure ! I love you, Kattie."

There was no misunderstanding me now. The unfeeling victim had turned the sport, and, with serious tooth, had bitten her. Her first expression was of injury, her next of awe, her third of pleasure, avowed reluctantly under drooping lashes.

"Kattie," I said, "you are glad that I love you? You will love me, too?"

Her eyes met mine an instant. In them was the light kindled only at one altar,—one flash of full, responsive affection ; then over her swept that self-disdain which seemed to follow her every exhibition of sentiment. She turned and walked quickly to her horse.

I took a step to follow her. I had a strange forewarning that I must now wrest an avowal from lips as

well as eyes ; that here, where I had first sought her love, I must win her pledge of betrothal. It was one of those feelings that come we know not whence,—a command as exact as it was mysterious. But before I could reach her she had sprung upon her horse, and, with a prick of spur, was dashing through the woods, flying homeward.

It had become the custom of the family lately to withdraw, leaving Kattie and me to pursue our tasks in solitude. Old Judd retired, I suspected, in disgust at my inability to “work him up.” Dorothy withdrew for other reasons.

I had been but a short time at Oare’s when I realized that, though the visions of the younger sister might refuse to embrace me, those of the elder did not. Poor work-world Dorothy ! She was not ambitious, and romance was satisfied to her in very clayey heroes. I respected her deeply. But her goodness, her thrift, her unselfishness, her love, by some perversity of masculine levers, could not weigh down the volatile charm of Kattie,—visionary, self-willed, elusive Kattie, whose hero I could not be.

I maintained always the stupidest obtuseness to Dorothy’s feeling, and she strove with a self-respecting heroism to conceal it. But the effort was futile, till, one night, when, as I leaned over the table, pointing out to Kattie some angles, a curl, the softest brown thing, fell across my hand. Kattie was absorbed in her lines. I was behind her,—she could not know,—I raised the ringlet to my lips. As I did so I glanced up. Across the room stood Dorothy, the plate in her hand held rigidly, her face tense with a pain whose surprise seemed like a paralysis. I dropped the curl and re-

turned to my chair. Presently I heard Dorothy move. She was at her wiping again. After that she managed always to have her work ended before our night's task commenced.

## IV.

The evening following my interview with Kattie upon the bluff, old Oare had one of his visitations of the "grippin' rhumatiz." He had several varieties of the affliction, each sacred to a different section of his anatomy. The "grippin' rhumatiz" seized him always in the shoulder, and to-night he sat hunched up beside the fire, summoning Dorothy incessantly to prepare some new decoction, or to try the merits of another liniment.

"I wish to the Lord Dave was here," he ejaculated, at last, with melancholy irritation. "If I could hear a rousin' good yarn as ud work me up once, I think mebbe this here rhumatiz ud loosen its grip. I've just had no end of grips since Rullett left. I'm so pesky lonesome I haven't no spirit to fight 'em off. I'm going to skair up some one to hang out here instead of Dave."

The suggestion of another inmate for the house, a companion-piece to Judd, was appalling. Oare was not the type of which one covets duplicates. Besides, I did not wish to share my prerogatives. I resolved to divert the catastrophe, if possible. So, when Kattie settled back for her nightly stint of fiction, I opened upon the most harrowing tale in my collection. Buccaneers scoured the main, chasing galleons ballasted with treasure. Turbaned chiefs swung the cutlass with indiscriminate gusto. Outlaws eclipsed themselves in



prodigious achievements, and duennas, lovely as hours and rich as fabled genii, were the virtuous trophies of victory.

Old Oare was indifferent at first, harping upon his bereft condition. But when the buccaneers hove in sight of their prey he laid his latest bottle upon the floor, and bristled up to the issue. Kattie, too, was all attention. It was the first time I had descended to the baldly sensational, and the story to her bore the righteous coloring of former respectability.

I knew by the mistiness of her eyes that I was carrying her out of earth range; that to-morrow she would be "Miss Katharine," separated by an impassable gulf from plain Julian Furnam. Still I must exorcise Judd's discontent, and I kept on pitting my heroes against impossible odds till the last enemy had fallen, and wealth and beauty were secure in the arms of reeking valor.

When I finished, Judd sat for full ten minutes silent under the coercion of the spell; then, with a doleful snarl, he screwed himself up.

"It's back; the blamed grip's back," he wailed. "Them fellers didn't half fight. I could 'a' did up the hull lot myself. They were cowards, cowards. They died long before they were killed. This pesky rhumatiz's clawin' me again. Now, Rullett ud tell them yarns that powerful the sweat ud pour out of you. You'd be hot as fire, an' so pegged out along of the slashin' an' losin' blood, you'd just tumble onto the bed an' drop asleep. Uh! the grip's got me—the grip's got me——"

"Dad," Kattie struck in. Her concern for her father's affliction was always slight when he "took on," and she was now too permeated with epic exhalations to

trouble herself much about his grips. "Dad," she broke in, "the great ladies in the stories are always rich. I want some cattle."

"You be rich now," Judd growled. "You an' Dorothy's the richest gals in the parts. What more do you want?"

"I don't feel rich. I want to feel rich. I want something—something of my own. I want some cattle."

"You'll have 'em all, all I've got, you an' Dorothy, when I'm dead."

"It's horrid to want anything, and have to wait for it till folks are dead. You oughtn't to wish they'd die, and yet, till they do die——" She stopped, and Judd was silent,—silent such a long, long while. At last he said, slowly,—

"You can have the cattle, Kattie. You can take the herd of yearlin's, because you're the youngest, an' Dorothy she can take the two-year-olds. To-morrow I'll halve the suttlemint, an' give you each a quarter."

"Thank you, dad. I'll be rich then."

"Yes, you'll be rich."

There was another long silence. Judd's rheumatism seemed to have passed. He rose to retire. When half-way across the room he paused. I was seated by the table, Kattie beside me, in her low stool. A sudden suspicion flashed in Oare's face,—an awakening that became, by degrees, conviction.

"Be careful, daughter," he said, in slow warning. "There's them as'll court you now for your steers an' your acres. Fight shy of 'em."

I jumped from my seat at the covert attack, but with a look of undaunted obstinacy Judd continued on his

way. So I picked up my book in sullen silence, and, without pausing for my accustomed "good-night," strode to the solitude of my own apartment.

My host's assault seemed to leave me but one course of action, to gather together my belongings and vacate, —a work to which I reluctantly devoted myself next morning.

Kattie did not breakfast with the rest. She appeared about ten o'clock in her white trappings, "Miss Katharine," as I had foreboded. How fresh she looked! How rosy and self-satisfied! My heart sank.

"Come, Katharine; I've kept things nice and hot," Dorothy called. "Come and get your breakfast."

The atmosphere of Kattie's fancies must have been bracing. She disposed of her clams and salmon steak with the wholesome relish of youth. Then she took her low seat beside the fire, crossed her hands behind her head, and abandoned herself to dreaming.

Through my open door I could watch her, and her content and abstraction added to my desolateness. Her father's charge had left no rankle in her mind. No mutual resentment held for me the sweet confession of a common cause. Indeed, I doubted if she had heard the captious warning at all. Her thought was probably with the buccaneers.

The winter rains had set in, and outside the landscape was leaden and depressing. The little white figure, swathed in the rosy fire-glow, gave to the interior an air of luxurious ease that to my galled soul was restful. But I was impatient at her mood. I wanted her to realize that I was going and to deplore it. I wanted her to know that I resented her father's base inference. I wanted—yes, I wanted her to say that the hated acres

need not be a bar between us. I could stay with my melancholy no longer. I picked up a volume that belonged to her and sauntered out.

"I want to return this," I said, as I approached. "I am packing, and I do not wish it to get stowed away. You may need it."

"Thank you," she said, simply. She dropped the book into her lap, recrossed her hands, and continued her musing.

I was disheartened. "Miss Katharine" was averse to talking, that was plain. But here I was, at least, close to her.

The rain outside increased—became a storm, and I was half glad, because, now, I could not move to-day. Old Oare had started off early upon some errand to Slack's. Dorothy had dedicated the day to a quilt, set up in one of the squatters' apartments. I was alone with the girl I loved. I drew out the large easy-chair, spread upon the table some cross-section diagrams as a disguise, and followed Kattie into dreamland.

I was back in the home of my father. About me moved a figure robed in white, but dainty, congruous, and the clasps upon her arms were beaten gold. She flitted through the house, always the same vision of beauty, airily ideal, stanchly human, and I closed my eyes to feel how she paused in her passage to rest her lips a moment on my brow, to touch my hand, or whisper some low love-note. Kattie was my wife. I was content.

The afternoon passed, the early night had fallen, the lights were glowing through the rooms, and still Kattie was in mist-land, oblivious to me, and I was in mist-land, dreaming dreams of her, when I was jarred back

to reality by the noise of the old man shuffling up the steps onto the porch.

"It's so miserable dark outside in these here rains a citizen's liable to break his neck watchin' out for his feet," he was observing, humorously. "Dor'thy, Dor'thy! open the door, so's we can find our way in. I've fetched you comp'ny, an' we're wallerin' out here like cattle. Open the door."

Dorothy swung wide the door, and Judd entered, ushering in with uncouth ceremony a stranger. He had been abroad coralling a companion, and this was Slack's contribution to the household.

The stranger would, upon inspection, have been convicted of forty years' hard service to life. There were deep lines across his forehead, and growing wrinkles about his eyes. His mouth had a sinister curve which was artfully disguised by a cavalier sweep of the moustache. Still, he was undeniably handsome, being well-built, tall, and shapely. His attire, albeit a trifle seedy, had yet a studied effectiveness; his boot-tops were worn outside, which emphasized the muscularity of his limbs, and his hunting-jacket and round cap gave a jauntiness which well simulated youth. He wore a heavy watch-chain and two rings, one a blood-stone, the other an opal, noticeable more for its size than the purity of its color. His manners were affable, his conversation easy; but while he talked and smiled, his eyes had a keen glitter that affected one unpleasantly. Judd turned to me with a hand wave.

"Mr. Furnam, let me interduce my friend Mr. Devins."

I rose, extended my hand, withdrew it with some instinct of distrust, extended it again, in a sense of failing

courtesy, yet was glad that the man, ignoring my advance, simply bowed his recognition.

"Mr. Devins, this here's my daughter Dor' thy, an' that one there by the fire's Kattie."

Dorothy nodded distantly. She, too, seemed illy pleased; but Kattie was intent upon her dreams. She had lost the presentation entirely.

"Kattie," Judd called. "Ah, I see,—Katharine. Katharine, I've fetched home a citizen as can tell us all about smugglers an' pirates. He's fit 'em hisself down somewhere in Africa. An' he's warred agin the Zulus an' bought a hull drove of slave women an' set 'em free to once. He's hunted lions an' elephants, an' has seven holes onto him now where he's been gored along of their tusks. He's saw the world an' knows all about it. Katharine, this here's your dad's friend, Mr. Devins."

I watched anxiously to note whether, by the Delphic insight of her higher organism, Kattie would confirm the impression Dorothy and I had received of the stranger. My disgust can be imagined when, with a regal swirl of her train, she glided to him, reached her hand in warm cordiality, and announced with her statelyst air and choicest English,—

"We are pleased to welcome you to the Settlement, Mr. Devins, for our own sake as well as for dad's. Oare's has been very quiet since the squatters moved away."

With one of his quick surveys Devins had scrutinized the young girl. The commonness of her surroundings gave a fictitious elegance to her attire, and the correctness of her manner and speech was exaggerated in contrast with the provincialism of her relatives.

"And it is a pleasure to me, Miss Oare, to find at the Settlement such a home and—and such a hostess."

His admiration was shaded to no reverential delicacy, but she, poor child! was unaccustomed to the finer graces of social intercourse. She blushed under his strong gaze, but she smiled, too, in childish vanity.

"Come, Dor'thy," Judd called; "we've rode a good ways, an' if these rains ain't wettin' they've a terrible trick of sappin' you. Draw up, pardner. Dor'thy, load on the vittles."

The supper was served, and we all seated ourselves, Kattie being next to the new-comer. As Judd's hunger became appeased he grew more and more garrulous.

"Well, Katharine," he asked, turning to his daughter, "you been feeling pretty rich to-day? A gal as has a whole drove of yearlin's given her ought to feel kind of comf'table, shouldn't you say, Devins?"

"Rather," the guest allowed. He was about to add something, but he refrained.

"An' I was as good as my word, Katharine," Judd continued. "I had the deeds drawn up down to Slack's. A quarter of Oare's belongs to you, an' a quarter to Dor'thy. Now you can be like the grand ladies in the stories."

He leaned over and patted her head indulgently. Devins was silent, sunk in revery. As he looked up he met my eyes, which were bent sharply upon him. He moved uncomfortably, shook off his air of reflection, and glanced across with a look of vacuous innocence, which shifted under my close watch to a subtle cunning. He inclined his head to me in a salute, half a sneer, half a defiance, and took up the conversation.

"We get false ideas of grand ladies from stories, I

think," he said. "I've seen the beauties of the East—Circassian slaves—sultanas, even—and the high lights of Europe, and they have none of them equalled in beauty or charm some that I have met on—yes, on our own frontier."

He bent upon Kattie a look of such unequivocal reference that she lowered her head in girlish confusion. Still the pleased smile lurked about her lips.

"I wonder, Oare," he continued, "that you haven't seen the world. You've got money, or land, which amounts to the same thing, and your daughter ought to be among her equals. She'll end by marrying one of these boors about here, when she might marry a gentleman."

The "boor" was aimed like a shoulder blow at me.

"The 'boors' hereabouts," I broke in, savagely, "are at least honest men, who seek their wives because they love them. The frontier is not the place for 'gentlemen.'"

I sent my challenge in the accent of the word. We had crossed swords now, and the duel was to a finish.

"You come from the East, do you?" Devins asked, after a pause. He asked the question absently, as though to cover a move he feared to betray.

"I come from Rochester, New York. My father is Julian Furnam, chief engineer of the ——— Railroad. The family has lived in Rochester since its founding. Our record is there in the annals of the town. Might I inquire where you belong?"

The question for which he had set the precedent seemed to annoy him. He started from his preoccupation.

"I—I hail from 'Frisco," he answered, curtly.



"'Tisn't manners, Mr. Engineer," Judd announced "to require folks' history out West. People's liable to be a trifle tetchy about their names an' their ant'cedents."

"So I perceive," I replied, with measured meaning. The vindictive curve on Devins's mouth was illy disguised by the cavalier moustache.

"How disagreeable you are to-night!" Kattie said, addressing me. "I didn't know you could be so. I dislike cynical people."

The remark had a caustic censure that silenced me. She had championed the new-comer, and resented my espionage. I could not understand her. I was loath to admit that this meteorite could become my rival. But when, the next night, and the next, she appeared in her white robe to listen to the adventures which the stranger was detailing to her father, I realized that not only had the handsome recruit entered the lists, but, by some devil's necromancy, he had vaulted to the place I coveted. He had made himself a living personality in Kattie's dreams.

Our guest was astute. He had worked with skill, I conceded him that. The tales he related were all of his individual experiences. He was himself the hero, rarely obtruded, always assertively present,—a figure, in its shadowy outlines, colossal, imposing. I could see that Devins's art was lost upon Judd. But to Kattie, whose vivid imagination consorted with shades, the veiled Colossus was the giant genius of the whole. Here, now, were romances breathed from the very lips of their living hero. And here was this hero, of doughty deeds and chivalrous sentiment, courting her nightly with open homage. Life had come to her at

last. The seraph poesy had spread its wings over Oare's Settlement, and left it too enchanted.

And Kattie herself had caught the mystic charm. The light in her eyes was so mellow, the smile on her lips so frank, her movements had such rhythmic grace, her head bore so proudly its poise of exaltation,—dream had become reality, and reality wove all the sweet investiture of dreams.

And this was my portion.

## V.

Devins had been at the Settlement now several weeks, and I, seeing the goal of his designs, had reconsidered my plan of going, and remained. I had given up the hope of winning Kattie, but I felt that in the pending tournament she was no match for her wily antagonist, and I loved her too deeply to forsake her, even though her actions told me plainly that my presence was superfluous.

In the evenings, as Devins spun his heroics, I sat apart, and Dorothy had ceased absenting herself. Through those desolate weeks Dorothy's gentle sympathy had been very soothing. As Kattie's interest waned, her sister was betrayed again into revelations; and I—well, in my misery, perhaps I showed too strong a gratitude for her pity.

She was living in a state of content which my numbed faculties failed to interpret. But latterly her content seemed dashed with fitful depressions. As she came upon Devins and Kattie sometimes her mouth hardened, and she studied them with rebellious eyes. Sometimes her gaze grew misty, and her lips relaxed to regretful tenderness. Some conflict was raging in Dorothy's

heart,—a conflict momentous and of doubtful issue. For two months this spectral struggle had gone on at Oare's, but the end came at last.

"I don't seem to catch a studdy grip onto Devins's stories," Judd remarked to me one day. "But they're roarin' good stories for all that. He's hootin' comp'ny to have round, 'specially through this rainy winter, when the settlers hereabouts is troubled so with rhumatiz. You'll be glad to know he's liable to bide here some time, seein' he's raked in the trump. You won't bear him no grudge, I'm hopin', for cuttin' you out. 'Twas a fair fight, an' he's downed you."

"No," I said, quietly, "I bear him no grudge. It was for Kattie to choose between us. If she is happy, I accept my fate."

"You've got grit, Mr. Engineer, an' you wear well. I mistrusted you at first, but I take that back, askin' your pardon. I've got another daughter; Dor'thy's mighty struck on you, an' she'll have half the Suttle-mint same as Kattie, even if she been't own child to me. You'd better make up to Dorothy. You'd have more luck with her."

"Mr. Oare," I said, with dignity, "I respect your daughter Dorothy. I love your daughter Kattie."

"But Kattie's took," he said, obstinately. "She's dealt to t'other citizen."

"And I abide by her choice."

I had held from the first an unreasonable prejudice against Devins. I say unreasonable, because it had no basis save that of personal antipathy. But I had labored in vain to ferret out his history. He was glib with his fable record, but very reticent about facts, which added to my uneasiness. I suppose it need not have con-

cerned me, but I longed to know that, in yielding my love, I yielded her to one of whose honor and integrity I had ample assurance.

Old Oare might have helped me, perchance, by a few casual inquiries, but he was ruled by the spirit of frontier "manners," and too much under the spell of his guest's achievements to tolerate any question of his character.

Dorothy meanwhile had become a puzzle. She had lost all her old easeful composure. From heights of happiness she would plunge into depths of stolid depression, out of which, remembering her kindness, I strove always to rally her with words of cheer and sympathy.

One day—it lacked but six weeks of Christmas, and the wedding was set for Christmas—Dorothy seemed to have struck the very bottom of the abyss. She started up spasmodically, as if moved to action, but abandoned the purpose, and relapsed into stoicism. Sometimes she studied me with yearning eyes; sometimes in them was strife—a dumb defiance; sometimes tears, which fell unheeded. To seek confidence from Dorothy was futile. Hers was one of those insulated natures that move only to internal pressure. I must wait.

It was about ten in the morning that, as I sat in my room alone, figuring the dip of a coal vein, my door, slightly ajar, was thrust abruptly open, and Dorothy entered. Her face was a study. Her eyes, large and dilated, had in them the glitter of a bayed animal's; her mouth was set, her jaw was rigid. Her whole expression bespoke a suffering soul which an iron hand had crushed relentlessly. Yet over the countenance

played a strange glow of gladness,—the transfiguring light of self-surrender. For the first time in her life Dorothy was handsome. She spoke without preamble, standing firmly erect.

"I've fought for weeks, Mr. Furnam," she said, "for weeks and weeks, but it's no go. It's no go. I thought to keep it secret, then Kattie'd have married him, and you, being desolate, might have taken up with me, and I'd have been your wife—I'd have been your wife! But, thank God, I've been strong enough at last. His name isn't Devins, and he doesn't hail from 'Frisco. His name's Edwards, he belongs to Charleston, and he's hunted."

"Hunted!" I echoed, incredulously. "You're sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure," she said, drearily. "He got a letter. That time he rode down to Skookum 'twas for the letter. It came from some woman,—'Madeline' she signed herself. She said that the officers had tumbled to his name of Devins, and were trailing him. This morning come a telegram. The boy rode up with it from Skookum, and I opened it, being as Devins was at Slack's. It was warning him to make tracks.

"Now he's sung Kattie some kind of tune, for she told me how he was persecuted of his uncle, who wanted his property, and I found out she sold, a month ago, half the drove of yearlings and gave him the money. And day before yesterday she sold t'other half. She's tied up her Katharine dress, an' it's my idea if he's got to light out she'll light out with him."

My disgust was only equalled by my dismay. Head-strong, lawless Kattie, with her obstinate woman's surrender of all things,—what a pliant tool she had been to the designs of this rascal! I shrank from shattering

her young faith. Would the delicate wings ever soar again, the rent tendrils ever knit? How I pitied her, my poor, impulsive darling!

"I wish, Dorothy, you had given me this information when you first got it," I remarked. It was a cruel stab,—I saw it in the defensive warding of her hand. To have fought the fight with stake of fondest hopes; to have conquered, and all for a reproach! Really my love for Kattie left me base.

"Forgive me, Dorothy," I said, in repentance. "You are a brave, noble woman. If we are yet in time to rescue your sister she will owe her future to you. I will ride immediately to Skookum and telegraph Charleston for information." I hastened from the room, but as at the door I turned to caution secrecy, I stood overcome by the hopelessness of the girl's face. How much of her life went into Dorothy Oare's sacrifice no language could have proclaimed with the pathos of that look. I came back and laid my hand upon her bowed head. "God bless you always, Dorothy," I said, "and send you a husband worthier of you than I could ever be."

"Go!" she replied, all quietly. "Go, save Kattie!"

I hurried away, saddled and rode off, taking the nearest route to Skookum.

I had travelled two hours, had crossed the bounds of the Settlement, and was within a few miles of my destination, when three horsemen passed me, riding a good, brisk gait. Suddenly the foremost reined in, and, facing back, accosted me.

"Hello, Furnam!" he called. "We're makin' for your place. We're after a chap that's sojerin' down to Oare's,—a chap that's wanted in South Car'liny."

It was the sheriff of the county.

"What's he wanted for?" I inquired.

"For? For the pen'tenshary," he announced.

"But what is his offence?"

"Offence, you say! Forger; forged three notes; one on his old uncle that raised him, and lit out with the money. Bad bird, that,—needs cagin'. Real name's Hi Edwards. He's a rovin' kind of customer, been about consider'ble. Record's rather spicy. Hain't cut up any shindy down to Oare's?"

"No; he's been respectable at Oare's."

"Reformin', mebbly. Them rogues always reform before a new blow-out."

My mission to Skookum was forestalled. I turned and rode back with the posse. As we neared the house, Dorothy came out and whispered excitedly,—

"They're gone. Kattie came in some time after you left, and put on her riding-suit. I didn't suspect anything, for I'd the telegram in my pocket. But ten minutes later I see her off'n the edge of the wood, riding like mad. She was mounted on Rocket, and leading Baldy. They're the fastest roadsters on the place. But Kattie must have forgot Baldy's stone-bruise; his foot'll give out, I'm afraid. They've got two hours' start on you. They're making for Olympy, an' it's my idea that they'll ship to Canady. I told dad," she added, hesitatingly, "and at first he just sat like stunned. Then he got out the bay mare and took his rifle. There'll be bad work if Dad Oare overhauls Devins. Dad left just one word: 'Send Furnam by the lower road, and give him t'other rifle.'"

She brought me the weapon from the house, and, notifying the sheriff of the status, we set out, taking,

as Judd had directed, the lower road to Olympia. It was late in the afternoon when we passed the fork where the two approaches met, and scarcely half a mile beyond we came upon a group, a trio,—pursuer and pursued. Judd has never been communicative upon the details of that capture, but he sketched it once in crude outlines.

“When I turned the fork,” he said, “I saw before me my two horses. Rocket was afire, an’ plungin’ for head ; but Kattie held him reined in abreast his mate. Baldy’d got a stone in under his hoof, an’ he was goin’ some halt, favorin’ that leg ; still he’d made good time for a lame beast, an’ Devins warn’t a sparin’ him, I’ll tell you, diggin’ the spurs an’ lashin’ like he was astride some cayuse.

“When they caught sight of me behind they urged the horses like mad, but I gained on ’em slowly, an’ when I come within hailin’ reach I hollered Devins to rein in, but he only drove his spurs deeper an’ dashed ahead. I wasn’t in any mood for coaxin’ just then, so I raised my rifle, sighted, an’ drew. Just in that second Kattie turned, an’ before I could fetch breath she’d headed Rocket across the road, straight in the path of my ball. I dipped the barrel, but the trigger’d struck, the lead was gone. My aim was sure, my fire meant death ; I waited to see my Kattie drop, but—I gave a great cry—the bullet took the saddle-horn : the dip had saved her.

“I lowered my rifle then, for that gal, without a flinch, had set Rocket right in the tracks of Baldy, coverin’ Devins ; an’ him, the cowardly villain, he rode for life before my child.

“The bay mare’d hauled all mornin’, an’ she was givin’ out. Things begun to look glum. I come to



b'lieve he'd escape yet before my very eyes. I was gittin' desperate, bein' how's my blood was up ; so I watched my chance till Rocket edged a trifle out of line, aimed low along the ground, an' fetched Baldy, by the help of God, in the game foot.

"The critter lurched aside so suddenly Devins a'most lost his perch. But he managed to clear the animal's back jest as it went down under him. I was sorry to cripple the beast, but I couldn't take any chances on the man, an' while Baldy was flounderin' in the roadway I come up to them.

"I didn't speak to Devins, nor to Kattie,—there didn't seem to be anythin' to say. I just got off'n the mare, an' set about ungirthin' the saddle from the down hoss. Devins was takin' notes on its leg, but I kept my eye slantwise on him.

"I was some minutes lookin' over Baldy, makin' up my mind that I'd best shoot him, he was so crippled, when I saw Kattie whisper something to Devins. His face lit up. He gave a little laugh, an' suddenly, with one turn, before I could wink, he'd leaped onto Rocket and was away. That gal had slid off her own saddle an' planted his while I was studyin' Baldy.

"There wasn't any time to lose now. Devins was straight game with no woman to shield him. I covered his rascal heart an' drew. But just as the trigger struck, Kattie she threw herself agin me ; the ball was turned, it missed his heart, but fatched him in the hip. He tottered an' gripped the saddle, and swayed unsteady-like from side to side, then lost his seat and fell backward to the ground. Kattie tossed her hands up and ran to him, but Rocket jest kicked her heels an' took to the road."

That was how we found them. Baldy lay across the highway dead, for Judd had returned, after crippling Devins, and ended the beast's suffering. Some rods in advance was stretched the outlaw, supporting his head upon his arm, while Oare, withdrawn a space, contemplated him with a satisfaction grim and relentless. Over her prostrate lover Kattie hovered, soothing him with pathetic tenderness, and stanching his blood with futile devotion. As we approached Devins raised himself. He did not seem surprised.

"That's the sheriff," I heard him say to Kattie; "I guess it's a round up."

The sheriff had perennial summons to Slack's; he was a person of familiar aspect.

"Well, Devins," he inquired, as we drew near and took in the situation, "you campin' out? You much hurt?"

"I can't say," Devins replied. "The wound bleeds ugly, but the joint works. I wish you'd examine and find out."

The sheriff cut away the cloth and inspected the hip.

"No, that's nothing," he announced, amiably. "A week's delay, that's all. And there's no hurry," he encouraged him; "William'll wait for you. Folks are obligin' down in South Car'liny."

Devins smiled ironically.

"That chap Williams sticks to you close," the sheriff continued. "It must be agree'ble to have such stiddy friends. You ought to be brothers, favorin' each other so. I understand you're as like as two peas."

Devins parried with a change of theme.

"You'll have to send for a conveyance," he observed, "if you want to get me out of here. I can't make

Olympia a-horse. My hip's stiffened, and the jolting would start the blood again."

"Ah, we'll attend to your comfort, Mr. Wil—that is, Mr. Devins. We'll stay by you an' keep uncommon good watch on your leg. You'll have a conveyance sure, a good, roomy one, an' you needn't worrit yourself about the cost. The gover'mint'll pay your bill for a spell. It'll be a ease-up on your wife."

"Wife!" The word fell with such startled incredulosity that we caught breath in a gasp.

Poor Kattie! Throughout the sheriff's badinage, with its veiled taunt and mockery, she had stood looking upon her fallen hero with such loyal, reverent sympathy. Now, at the word "wife," she stepped back with a recoil, as from a blow. In her first surprise she seemed dazed, toyed idly with her belt, repeating, now and again, mechanically, the portentous "Wife! wife!"

But gradually she awakened to its import, and there was a visible quickening of her breath. Her mind, with every sensitive fibre alert, was working out the issue of its deception. Her face showed the veering phases of her thought in its spasms of suffering. Her eyelids twitched, her lips quivered; she was one palpitating pulse of pain.

The intensity of the effect left us all dumb. In that supreme moment our petty wrongs were forgot,—the bitterness was hers alone, and we stood hushed in the presence of her tragedy.

She was wrestling visibly, seeking the height whereon she might command herself. And she reached it at last, for over her swept that self-disdain which followed always her conscious betrayals. In shuddering nerve and throbbing vein were marked the throes of her young

soul's mastery. She looked in her gathering of force so like Dorothy. Her features settled slowly to a vigor almost masculine. Her eyes looked down upon her treacherous lover with a summons stern, inexorable, and under her gaze Devins quailed, as he had not under the leaden vengeance of her father. She asked but one question,—that was concentrated into two words :

“Your wife?”

He was silent. His eyes shifted to escape the issue, but the cold glitter in hers drew him back with a power mysterious, invincible.

“Your wife?” she asked, imperiously.

“Yes,” he faltered.

She stood so still, looking away. Not a fibre stirred, not a feature changed. Whatever of tumult shook her soul raged in the hidden deeps alone. No faintest ripple sent its unrest across the marble of her face.

Kattie's reproachless silence deceived Devins. With the spell of her eyes withdrawn, he regained some of his *sang-froid*, and through it a hope of swaying her again, and he said, in half appeal,—

“We were never suited, Madeline and I. She was a cold-natured woman, always nagging a fellow. She never understood me ; she couldn't. Her mind was all prose, no poetry in it, and I was full of sentiment. Now, a woman like you might have done anything with me. We were affinities, but Madeline—she's too old and exacting.”

Kattie cast one look, of such contempt as I have never seen written upon a human countenance. Then, without a comment, she turned and walked slowly to her father.

“Take me home, dad, will you?” she asked.

An appeal from Kattie, whose lips seemed divinely curved to imperatives, had a double force of pathos. She was humbled piteously.

"No," Judd said, "I can't take you home. I been't goin' home. I'm goin' to Olympy, an' I'm goin' to South Car'liny. There's Furnam. Go to him. He'll take you home."

She stood irresolute, and I, stepping across, reached her my hand.

"Come, Kattie," I said; "I'm going back. Will you ride with me?"

She hesitated. The sensitive blush surged up, crimsoning her very temples. Her eyes were lowered; her head was bent in humiliation; her whole mien was of the deepest abasement.

"Dorothy sent me to you," I said; "Dorothy. She is waiting for us at home. Will you come?"

She raised her eyes timidly. How much her eyes had changed! There were no erratic flashes in them now, only the mellow glow of saddened, militant womanhood.

My extended hand still held its invitation. In it she laid hers. The little fingers trembled. I clasped them closely, and led her away from the scene of her painful awakening.

To set her saddle in place of her father's was short work, and, mounting, we rode back, nor did she turn once to look again upon the man for whom, a short hour before, she had so daringly periled life.

That night, as I sat in the old place before the paper-strewn table, Kattie entered the room softly, bearing in her hand a bundle. She came close to me, opened it, and shook out the fleecy folds of her fateful "illusion"

robe. Then she approached the hearth, and, shading her eyes, dropped it silently amid the flickering embers. As the last film faded she turned away, leaving me the "good-night" of a smile, sweet, submissive, grateful,—a smile that deepened my love to reverence.

## VI.

I left the Settlement next day and went back to my old camp in the mountains.

A shock such as Kattie's mind had received must, to one of her confiding temperament, shake the props of all character. In her first reaction she would swing, I knew, to a cynical scepticism, a hard distrust, which would leave all cold and colorless. Her girlhood had passed forever, and if with it should not pass the sweetness and the faith, it must be that her thought might rest still against a nature that would redeem to her her ideal of faithfulness.

Would my discarded love prove now a reed, frail perhaps, but strong enough to bear her up against the current of misanthropy? How I prayed that it might! That I, who had stood debarred from poesy, should, in her recoil, be the one through whom would be revealed the poetry of the commonplace.

My love for her had attuned my mind to all the melody and meaning in the world. If, now, it might so draw the music of Kattie's mind as to tune it to the same sweet chord, what richness of sound might not our blended souls give forth? If her fancy could cable itself to the actual, my honest love might catch some rainbow tints and glow into a promise of glory.

But her character must adjust itself first to other planes, and natures grow so slowly. I did not want a

marriage which should be to my wife a contract; it must be to us both a sacrament. And so I waited,—waited for solitude to make my presence needed; waited for Dorothy's nobility to quicken the latent beauty in her sister. But, oh, how weary was the waiting!

After the return of Mr. Oare from Carolina I ventured to correspond with the family, and I had regular replies. The writing was Kattie's, but the epistles were uniquely Judd's. Never a word or a message bore to me the greeting for which I hungered. Life had fallen, I inferred, into the old ruts, and time was bringing no events to Oare's Settlement. So the summer passed.

As the rains set in, my heart went back unceasingly to my dreams of home, and to the hopeful days before the coming of Devins. I began to feel very despondent. Why, through all this time, had Kattie made no advance? Was she still indifferent? I would not, could not, believe it. I began to reproach myself for expecting an advance. Kattie's finer instincts would rebel against an overture. At last I grew so desperate that I resorted to stratagem.

I had been ailing slightly since the winter set in. The trouble was mental, I knew, but it certainly afflicted me physically. In a letter to Judd I remarked upon my state of health, and trusted to pity to betray Kattie into a message.

I waited two—three weeks. Then one day, without a line of herald, into the camp rode old Judd Oare.

"You citizens must find yourselves uncommon good comp'ny," he remarked, when he was seated in our midst, "to git so far out'n the way of human's."

"Good company! We've fairly grown to hate each

other," I replied. "But how did you happen to come up?"

"Well, you see, Kattie she allowed that mountings were terrible unhealthy. She says mountings'll kill critters almost as quick as rhumatiz, an' there's a doctor moved to Slack's that can cure anythin'. Dor'thy told me to tell you Kattie's edication was in a bad way, an' if you didn't get back she was afraid we'd have to take on Dave again. You'd best come along down an' see that doctor."

"There's just one doctor for me, Judd," I replied.

He smiled knowingly.

"Well, pull up stakes an' get back down home."

How sweet that "home" sounded. I grew well in the prospect the simple word conjured up.

"And what have you all been doing these long months?" I asked, as we were under way.

"Well, we was always a bit slow," Judd replied; "but latterly, with Kattie's help, we've been comin' forred powerful. We've got fixed up down to Oare's. We've built a new section of fence an' painted the woodshed. Kattie took to helpin' Dor'thy about the house, but Dor'thy told her she wasn't fit to work; she was only in the way. So the child's took to makin' white fixin's for the winders, an' settin' out flowers, an' such like. The place looks awful fine. Seems like we was always on a picnic since Kattie's took hold. Nobody knew what the gal had in her till that rascal Devins turned out so."

We reached the Settlement late in the afternoon, and glowing lights from every window sent their cheering welcome far along the road. As we mounted the steps the door was thrown open, and Kattie, my Kattie,



quieter than of old, but radiant with a richer beauty, stood to make glad our home coming.

While we sat at supper I studied her, and was overjoyed to note to what a delicate nobility her nature had ripened. Her little attentions to her father were a delight to the old man, while her tenderness to Dorothy was affecting. I saw with, I confess, a touch of pique, that the latter had quite merged her interest in me in her adoration of her sister. I was now to Dorothy a something sacred to her idol, and as such beyond the reach of a personal desire.

After supper Judd and Dorothy withdrew, and I was left alone with Kattie. I drew my old seat before the fire, and set hers in place beside it.

"Stories ! I have outgrown them," she said.

"No, I have one more to tell you," I insisted. "It is an old story ; I told it to you once before, but——"

"You do not need to tell it. I know your story, Julian." She spoke slowly, standing beside my chair in timid consciousness. Then, with sweet dignity, she bent and pressed her lips upon my brow.

"And now, beloved," she said, "you, too, know mine."

## The Mavericks of the Trail.

### I.

**I**T was a raw, blustering day,—the unseasonable cold of a winter that obtruded into spring. The men had ridden in from the ranges, and sat huddled about the sheet-iron stove at Toge's. But its fire seemed infected by the inhospitality without; it had neither warmth nor cheer. The dreariness affected the men, making them irritable. They sat about smoking, with their chairs tipped and their feet propped upon the low rim of the stove, but there was no impulse to conversation.

They were cattle-men—all; some of them cowboys, some of them stock-owners, and two from the size of their herds were ranked as "kings." There was a third,—Ange Drew. He pushed the door open now and entered. He was a large man, plain, somewhat uncouth. His hair and beard, long uncut, were shaggy, his face was weather-beaten, and his clothes begrimed with dust. He wore a blue flannel shirt, corduroy pants, tucked roughly into a pair of high-heeled boots, a flaring felt sombrero, a flaming silk handkerchief, loosely knotted at the throat, and a broad Mexican belt. The latter held an ugly array of arms, and from its bulging contour one knew that Ange Drew was the treasurer, and that the formidable arsenal stood guard over the ready money which these long migrations consumed. The man's face, hard and

reserved, had yet something masterful. As he advanced into the smoke-sodden room, his bearing was in contrast to the listlessness of the company. He pushed his way between the chairs to the stove, which he contemplated a moment in open disgust.

"Toge," he said, turning to the desiccated specimen who presided at the bar, "have we paternized this establishment all the way from Texas, or have we not?"

"You have," Toge allowed.

"Did we notify the citizen that set up an opposition wagon that we'd gave our custom to Toge, and Toge it was?"

"You did."

"Did he skip the Trail broke?"

"I'm—afeard—he did."

"Have you chalked us two bits a glass for stuff that cost you a nickel, an' have we stood under like men?"

"You—you have," the proprietor reluctantly confessed.

"Then I serve you notice that we've bore your meanness as long as we're agoing to. If you don't put up better juice and make us more comf'table, you'll go. Get a move on you now and see to that fire."

The apathetic company had revived under the stimulus of Ange's assertive presence. It backed him with an interest of which it might have been deemed incapable.

Toge was too sensible a man to fly in the face of his patrons' protest. He allowed himself but a furtive flash of resentment in the direction of the king; then, with a grim smile of acquiescence, he came

from behind the bar and loaded the fuel on with such superfluous generosity that the sheet-iron stove became red, and the citizens of the Long Trail were driven to withdraw their feet and move off. Soon the door was thrown open, and the windows; and the proprietor chuckled slyly at his guests' discomfort.

Their shifting brought them presently to the other side of the room, where stood two small square tables with green baize coverings. And tables suggested naturally the card packs that protruded from each man's back pocket. Gradually they disposed themselves, some playing, some watching the games, and for a time conversation was confined to interjected directions and a running fire of oaths. But the three kings sat apart and spoke of the ominous season.

The band of cattle that halted here on the border of Wyoming was one of the many that year after year started from the breeding ranches of Texas and was driven north over the Long Trail for shipment to the Eastern market. They were mostly three-year-old steers, but among them was a goodly scattering of cows and heifers, whom the eating out of the Texas ranges had left scrubby. These were destined for the Colorado country, whose grazing lands were not yet overstocked.

But this year there had been formed a combination of speculators, and the kings, after the journey to Abilene, found the price of stock beared below the margin of profit. They had refused to be forced into a sale, choosing rather to hold over till the following summer, so the autumn found the entire band amid the ranges of southern Colorado.

The experiences had been only the normal ones of a cattle-drive. For the first few days the cowboys had sat the saddle continuously, forcing the stock by unbroken marches beyond the pale of their accustomed haunts. Presently the force of memory had been overcome, and the band had settled to the route.

It was a sight to see—this column; at the head, the brute leaders, wild, stout steers, with branching horns and long sinewy legs; beside them, on his small cow-horse, the human leader, scarcely less untamed; behind, in long winding file, the drove, with its mounted sentries, and in the rear the camp wagons and the cavayard reserve. The cattle held the march for but a few hours daily. At dawn they scattered over the range for their first feeding, after which they took the trail for three, sometimes for four, hours. Then they must water, and rest, and feed again, to journey perhaps a little farther, perhaps only to round up and settle to their bedding ground.

They had had their episodes, by the way, for their route lay across dry "broom-bunch" stretches and bitter sage brush tracts, and through coulées, where the freshet streams disguised their treachery. Here the young calves took at times to milling and were drowned, despite the fierce efforts of the keepers. Then the men were kept on the race for hours, heading back into line the cows who strove to return to their lost offspring. In places, too, the trail lay across ash-hued alkaline basins with water only at the close of long reaches. The column moved now in living, palpitating clouds of dust. It sifted through the men's clothing; it choked their eyes and throats. And when the wild-eyed leaders, setting their noses

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against the ground, gave a long, confirmatory sniff, and, tossing out the fierce bellow of announcement, started on their mad dash forward, the men gave them free head, for they knew that across the three or four miles of interval the animals had scented water, and that no human force could hold them back.

But most eventful of all the route was the section of the wind and the thunder, the terrible agents of stampedes. In these storms the qualities of the men were put to their last test. The beasts, their tails poised, their heads lowered, stood with eyes intent upon the horsemen, who narrowed their close circuit, calling to each other or *singing*. At a sudden thunder-clap the supreme moment came. Sometimes the dominance of the man prevailed, sometimes that of the beast. One terrified steer, dashing through the cordon, would fire the whole herd, which, a swinging, maddened mass, bellowing and ripping, would tear after, and woe to the man that fell!

With this drive was a fellow,—Cal Rice. He was one of the “hard citizens” of Texas, but he had no equal in keeping up the courage of startled steers. His songs were hymns, slow, tuneful chants, but their cadences had a very lawless way of breaking into imprecations when an animal made a dash for the guarded chain. In more than one stampede Cal Rice had proved his daring, and no one challenged his right to combine to his own taste the sacred and the profane.

Now in the autumn the band had finished its drive, and had come to the fertile ranges of Colorado. Here on the buffalo tufts and gramma growths the steers had thrived, and their growing weight made glad the calculating hearts of their owners.



But this winter in the Rocky Mountain country proved one of peculiar conditions; the weather had been mild with no snowfall, and the spring, when it came, brought the cattlemen face to face with a situation which had no place in their calculations. The winter had given to the country no reserves of moisture. A strange dryness prevailed, which through the days persisted. Rain, the only agent of relief, was withheld, and before the men began to move, veiled at first, but soon, alas! undisguised, the terrible spectre of drought. Then the cattle had been rounded up, and the northward drive begun. They had come now into Wyoming, where a deserted road-house had been temporarily appropriated for head-quarters. Here the owners met nightly in counsel to plan the rescue of the herd.

This was why at Toge's the kings sat apart, and the drivers relieved their depression in cards. They played—these men—with a strained eagerness. No event came to break the gloom of the calamity that was settling down upon them. They were shut in to its inexorable companionship, and they played for excitement, for oblivion.

Presently, two of the players, more impetuous than the rest, got into a wrangle,—it was over the claim to the pot,—and one, leaning across, dealt his opponent a fiercely convincing blow. The opponent retorted in kind, and the two closed across the table in a vicious assault. The partisans of each soon joined the mêlée, and through the smoke nothing was visible but the figures of fighting men. The kings looked on in silence till the fracas threatened to become general. Then Ange Drew arose. He rose slowly, with no emotion. In his manner was a composure and a directness

strangely at variance. He pushed the meddlers from his path as he advanced, and making his way between them, reached the table of the first antagonists, and, leaning down over it, closed his hand firmly upon the money of the pot. It was at once so autocratic and so daring that for a moment neither claimant moved. Then they drew themselves up, their eyes gleamed; their hands dropped to their belts as by instinct. But the fingers upon the stake had no wavering, the face above it no compromise.

"This money goes to the Maverick," Ange Drew announced.

"It don't; it's mine," Cal Rice insisted.

"'Tain't. I held a flush. It's mine," his companion contradicted.

"This money goes to the Maverick," Ange Drew announced a second time.

"Let the Maverick come and take it," Cal said, defiantly.

"Or the king either," the other added.

In the democracy of the plains there is no sovereignty of place; man and master are equal till one conquers supremacy. But there was no flinching now in the eyes that met the men's, no uncertain accent in the voice that addressed them.

"When Bill Bailey last year, riding in the hell of a stampede to save Gabe's stock, went down under the tromping hoofs of the steers, and all us men riding up couldn't drag him from under, we saw that day what a man is, an' what a beast is. And we took Bill Bailey's boy and we made him the Maverick of the Trail. And we agreed that whenever on this drive a man makes of himself a beast, a mad brute beast that would tromp



the life out of his fellers as the life was tromped out of Bill, that man must pay the debt of them steers to Bailey's boy. This money goes to the Maverick."

Cal was himself of heroic fibre. He felt the power of the king, and, like a brave man, he acknowledged it, dropping his revolver into the safety of his belt. But the other was obstinate. He stepped back to test the issue. At that moment Gabe, who stood beside the window, uttered an exclamation of such surprise that even the player suspended the demands of honor long enough to find out what unwonted occurrence had stimulated such curiosity. Ange Drew raked the money from the table and followed him. And they saw coming up the trail a thing that in camps and drives has no place,—a oman. The Maverick was leading her. He seemed excited—distressed. He ran a few steps in advance, then returned to hurry her, scanning the open country with anxious eyes. She dragged herself after him with great effort, and at last the lad was obliged to reach his hand and help her. And, holding by him, she stumbled to the door of Toge's, and, standing in it, faced the group of staring, silent men.

Then she spoke, hurriedly, under her breath, two words, "The sheriff!" but the drovers understood. She was a criminal, and the authorities were after her. They were outlaws themselves, many of them, and familiar with crime. But a woman! this woman! Their revulsion was unmistakable. Her face—such a young face—showed under its dust-streaks the pallor of fear. Her hands, that clutched a roughly-knotted bundle, were small and waxlike. She was such a strange, frail thing to be linked with crime. And even while they stood, across the valley they marked the figures of

horsemen. These were headed for the camp. They were moving to it by the straightest path. The cattlemen pressed forward with their eyes upon the riders, and the fugitive, following their gaze, saw, too, where the pursuers were closing in upon her. And she burst into the shack, and pressed into its farthest corner.

Then Gabe turned to her.

"What have you done?" he asked. "What are they after you for?"

She had been cowering before the men's visible hostility. At the question she drew erect. She was suddenly still, in a stillness that was almost violent. Then, with a swift defiance, she stepped out into the room.

"What did I do?" she said. "I shot him." The words were scarcely more than whispered, but they cut across the stillness like a blade. The men glanced at each other. That one so young, so frail, could thus proclaim her guilt made even that hardened circle shudder. But the next moment the woman had thrown her hands before her face, stifling a sound that might have been a sob.

The drovers looked out at the approaching horsemen stolidly. They had their records; they would not lightly bring themselves under the scrutiny of law. Besides, womanhood was to them the world's one sanctity, and this woman had desecrated it. She had put herself beyond the pale of their reverence, and so of their protection.

But one man had studied her in silence from her first appearance at the door. He was standing beside her now. From his height above her Ange Drew bent down and asked,—and he put it straightly,—

"You—you—lov—you cared for him?"

She raised to his bending face eyes that in their resentment fairly blazed. But the look that met hers seemed to check her ; her lips that had tightened in rebellion opened, and from them fell almost inaudibly, " Yes."

And the men sitting in condemnation felt themselves someway rebuked. Vaguely, dimly, they knew that in her sin there were elements they could not gauge.

Into her tragedy they sought no further. Her story, like their own, was a private thing not to be laid bare to strangers. Her enforced confession restored in some measure her womanhood, and brought her, remotely at least, within the range of their toleration.

## II.

The riders had mounted the slope meanwhile, and were now reining in at the door. Ange Drew stepped to the threshold. Then he faced back to his companions.

" We've had one Maverick of the Trail, boys," he said. " Now we've got two."

For some minutes no one replied. To tolerate was one thing, to champion was another. In that pause it seemed doubtful if the men would follow Drew's lead. But Bailey's boy, reaching his hand to Cal Rice, set himself in front of the woman, and his small defence was so humorously desperate that it won. The drivers closed in, in front of the lad, and Cal the profane began to hum his " Jerusalem, my happy home," to which the men responded in a low, rough laugh of recognition. This was the hymn sacred to storms. Cal sang it always as he rode his close, fateful circuit heading off a stampede. He, too, had accepted the new Maverick. She was

theirs now, one of them, and it would be a posse indeed that would stampede her.

But Bailey's boy could not understand the subtleties of the late incidents. He called to the leader in distress.

"Hide her, Ange ; please, please hide her."

"The men of the Long Trail hide nothing," Ange said, quietly.

To which Cal retorted, "You better bet they don't, Maverick."

Then the first horseman, reigning in, touched his hat to the king in the door, and, looking over the group, addressed them.

"I'm the sheriff of the county," he said, "and this here's the deputy sheriff. We've a warrant for the arrest of a girl that shot a man over in Cheyenne. She was a dancer down to Greve's Hall, and goes by the name of Miriam. She hadn't her equal on dancin' this side the Rockies, but she'd got Greaser blood and a Greaser temper. The man was one of the way-up citizens of Cheyenne,—owned no end of mines. There was some kind of quarrel, and she snatched up a revolver and fired. She made out to the proprietor she'd no idea she'd shot,—was so worked up she jist pulled the trigger without knowin' it. But the man's liable to die just the same. No one could get out of her what the row was about. Like all them Greasers, she's tricky. We've come on to her twict before, but she's gave us the slip. An hour ago she turned up the gulch and took the trail to this camp. Is she here?"

"Yes," said Ange Drew.

"She's a bad one, she is. She's as sly as these Wyoming gophers, and as quick. But it's a smart

woman that's going to git away from me. I took Jim Small the counterfeiter and brought him in alone afoot over forty mile. I've a record, I have. But blame me, if this shyin' filly ain't as hard to track a'most as though she flew. She won't git any much mercy out of young Chris Fielding, though. He'll put her through. Here's my warrant."

He passed a folded paper to Ange Drew, who took it, and holding it at arm's length before him, read it aloud throughout to his men. Then he folded it carefully and handed it back.

"It's a valiable document," he remarked, simply.

The sheriff was not unfamiliar with the temperaments of cattlemen. He began to perceive that the Texan type was very closely allied to the native product. He regretted that he had not shown himself more guarded in his approaches.

"You've read the warrant," he said; "that's our authority. Whereabouts in the camp is the woman?"

"She's here in the shack," Ange replied. He drew the puffs from his pipe with the same slow composure, bending his head in the direction he would indicate. So the sheriff dismounted and advanced to the door.

"I'm here to arrest her," he said.

But as his foot touched the lintel, a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"This shack is our head-quarters," Ange Drew announced, significantly.

"I'm an officer of the law."

"Of as much law as you can inforce," the other corrected him.

The sheriff stepped back a pace, and contemplated the assembled men. The door was full of heads, and

as far back as he could see were unkempt beards and brawny breasts. The view was a wholesome dissuader of rashness.

"Do you fellers mean to defy the Territ'ry of Wyoming?" he asked, sternly.

"No one has mentioned the Territ'ry of Wyoming, as I know," Ange Drew evasively replied.

"Will you—gents—step out the way, then, an' let me come in?"

"What do you say, boys? Do we give up the Maverick?" the leader asked. And the men smiled with a grim stolidity that was its own reply.

"You can—go in," Ange Drew remarked to the sheriff. But the invitation in the face of the drovers' covert defiance was a superfluous irony.

"You furreigners had better go slow," he observed ; "concealin' criminals that's evadin' justice and——"

"The men of the Long Trail have concealed no criminal," Drew asserted with forceful emphasis. "We've told you she's inside there. We've told you you can go in and take her."

"This Territ'ry ain't goin' to stand none of you lawless Texans," the sheriff broke out, hotly. "We'll fetch here the whole force ; we'll call out the militia. We'll——"

But Ange Drew smoked on complacently.

"We've ninety thousand head in our band, Mr. Sheriff. You can figure out our boys for yourself. When you fetch your militia, pick your men."

The officer, with an oath, faced about, and, laying his hand to the saddle, climbed disgustedly to his place. It was a sullen surrender, but still a surrender, and the drovers now were the first to propitiate. They flocked

out from the shack, and gathered about the party in a cordiality quite at variance with their late antagonism. And Ange Drew, coming up to the posse, addressed them with genuine frontier hospitality.

"Since we've despatched this little affair, friends, hadn't you better all git down and stretch your legs a bit. We've some snake-root inside that's mighty warmin' raw days like this. You've a long ride back."

The sheriff condescended to no notice of the invitation, being still under the stiff-necked resentment of outraged pride. But his subordinates took their defeat amicably. The ride had been, indeed, a cheerless one. A bid to the invigoration of snake-root was a thing local principles gave no warrant for declining. So they dismounted and followed Ange Drew. Then the sheriff, deserted of his staff, relented, and, leaving his official personality at the door, in the simple character of way-farer, joined his companions within. And there, a few feet from the woman he had come so far to capture, impotent, and perforce complaisant, he sat him down with the three kings and shared the hospitality of the Trail. Half an hour later, as the posse again mounted, and the sheriff, restored to his official personality, was repeating his assurances of a speedy despatch of militia, Ange sent them his parting word of advice.

"You'd better wire them back to Cheyenne that you can't find her," he drawled. "We're ninety thousand head, and we're Texans. We've put our brand on the woman. Innocent or guilty, she's the Maverick of the Long Trail."

But the sheriff, as he struck spurs and turned towards the valley, called back resolutely,—

"I'll have her yet, if all Texas holds her."

## III.

For some time after the departure of the officers, within the shack the woman sat crouched beside the stove. Occasionally she rose and shot a quick, furtive glance out of the window. But the lessening forms of the posse seemed to reassure her ; she came back and dropped again into her chair. Toge, in his curiosity to inspect her, came around to a second replenishing of the fire, but Ange Drew, who had re-entered, met the man's advances with a scowl, which Toge hastened to parry by an address to the new-comer.

"You'd better set off your cloak, mum, and your hat," he said. "You'll be liable to be puttin' up with us some time."

Thus bidden, the girl let fall the long, loose wrap that had enveloped her, and there stood before the men a creature in such fantastic guise as might well excuse Toge's exclamation. She was dressed in a short, close-fitting gown of crimson. Her arms were bare, and her throat. About her was a profusion of tinsel and tawdry jewelry, which glittered with a splendor quite impressive from the barbaric setting of her dress. She was bedecked just as she had escaped from the variety hall. Against the sombre background of the shack, she stood out bizarre but brilliant. Her attire must have been habitual, for she had no sense of its picturesqueness, or of the furtive attention it was commanding. She reseated herself with the same abstraction, and, folding her bare arms, stared into the fire.

Presently the cook called the men to supper. It was served upon the ground, and consisted of bacon,



canned meats, bread, and coffee. The Maverick, who had constituted himself the stranger's attendant, was now the one who brought her in her tin cup and paid her the special attention of setting out for her one of the baize tables which had remained in the deserted road-house. The Maverick was the only one of the assembly who seemed to have a place in her consciousness. Every little while she leaned over and touched him, as though to assure herself of his presence. And the boy hovered about her, a silent but vigilant guardian.

Later in the evening, when the night-shift saddled and rode out to relieve those on duty, a message was carried with them, for the new-comers did not rally as was their wont at Toge's. Instead, Ange Drew had given an order which was revising a corner of the road-house.

"You make up a bunk in here, Toge, and fix her out comfortable," he had said; and Toge had replied under his breath, "Curse the critter, anyhow!"

This woman, who had thrust herself into their midst, had become immediately an occasion for changes; changes which cost Toge trouble, and which, by banishing his patrons, cut off part of his revenue. The adoption of her by the force forbade his open opposition, but inwardly he was resolved that this second Maverick should remain only till his prolific mind could devise a way of getting rid of her.

Through the days that followed life settled back into its old ruts at Toge's. Miriam had brought from her small bundle a plain, dark, high-necked dress, which she had substituted for the stage costume in which she had first appeared. Since the day of her arrival

the men had never beheld it. But Ange Drew's impressions of the woman were those gathered from that first appearance.

She had a skin of marble,—a most peculiar pallor. Her eyes were large, dark, impetuous. She was not handsome in feature, scarcely of ordinary attractiveness, but she challenged interest by her veering expression and by her subtle capacity for feeling. Her body, sinuous as a snake's, had a litheness and a pliancy that were marvellous, while her hands and arms seemed the supreme utterance of her personality. When she roused herself from the sort of torpor in which she for the most part lived, she seemed the embodiment of motion. She expressed herself not chiefly by word, but by posture,—by action of hand or bend of limb. Her fingers were delicate and shapely as a child's, and Ange Drew grew cold, remembering what those slender things had done. But as he glanced up into the burning, restless eyes, he knew how that creature, all softness and grace and rhythm, could be fire and sword when her soul's rage swayed her.

But Miriam, the new Maverick, soon ceased to be the centre of thought to the camp. If she had been less numbed by the crisis of her life, she might have had herself some thought for the other tragedy that was being enacted about her. The kings, with the smaller owners, discussed it continually in solemn conclave at Toge's, and one night they decided to take up the drive again.

"I'm afraid if the rain did come now," Gabe observed, "it 'ud be too late for us. But we must do something; we can't hold the band here any longer.

They've eat out all the country. We can't go back, and——"

He did not finish. The knot of men reflected silently.

"It's bad ahead,—'most as bad as it is here," one remarked. "The local herds have had to range broadcast this year. I'm thinking we'll not come onto much grazing anywhere."

"As I figure it out," Gabe said, slowly, "there's just one chance. If we can make the country about the head-waters of the Missouri, there'll be bound to be feed. How many of the stock'll survive the drive we can't predict,—mighty few, I'm afraid. But here they'll all die. If you fellows see it the same way, we'd better order the boys to make an early start in the morning."

Since no alternative seemed left them, the plan was adopted, and at the earliest dawn the head of the mighty column moved again. As the steers fell into place, one noted how gaunt they were become, and with what halting feet they kept the uneven line. Each day now the weaker ones fell in farther to the rear, and for miles stretched the wavering rank of the stragglers. And many, halting for the noonday rest, could not rise again, and many dropped as they marched in the file they bravely strove to hold. Those coming after swerved, to avoid trampling the bodies of their stricken fellows, and the line became detached, irregular, more like a rout than an invading army. The nightly round-up now gathered smaller and smaller droves, and these did not shift their positions, but lay in a doze, too weak for exertion. At the head of the column Ange Drew rode slowly, so slowly he seemed scarcely to

move, and he left his post continuously to ride along the stretching flanks, or send an order to the rear. In the evening, from one settling ground to another, a prairie-schooner passed, which carried the two Mavericks.

From the day of Miriam's coming, the kings had heard nothing further of the sheriff. They had known that the local officials, with their small available force, would never come to open rupture with banded cattlemen. Though the worst had resulted, and the man was dead, homicides were too common an occurrence in Wyoming to warrant inconvenient extremities, especially when the capture was only a dancing-girl.

#### IV.

One night Toge announced to the assembly that he had disposed of his stock. He owned only a small band, but that anything was marketable this year suggested underhandedness.

"I sold them for a song," he allowed; "but by fall there'll be none to sell at any price."

"The fellow that you unloaded on,—was he a—tenderfoot?" Gabe asked.

Toge grinned.

"Well, I don't know but he was," he said, unabashed.

"And you didn't trouble to tell him the cattle were all dying on our hands, I suppose," Gabe observed, cynically.

"Oh, he'll find that out soon enough," Toge assured them.

It was on the day of Toge's sale that Miriam first

awakened to the suspense and despair of the men about her. It came through the little Maverick. The prairie-schooner was early in its jaunt that day, and the cowboys were driving the steers into line to take up their afternoon march. They had failed of water in the last stretch, and the summer sun was burning down upon them with an insistence that was pitiless. As Miriam glanced by chance at the Maverick, she saw that down the boy's cheeks tears were flowing.

She put out her hand and drew him to her.

"What is it, Maverick? Why do you cry? Have you trouble, too? I thought no one had trouble but me."

"Your trouble's done, but ours goes on day and day. Them heifers there, they were all mine. Ange gave 'em to me. Twict a year at the round-ups Ange branded a hundred calves for me, and this drove here was mine. I've watched them now for weeks as we passed by, and each day they was sicker and sicker. It's awful to see 'em suffer so, and not be able to do nothin'."

"Can't the men do anything,—Ange or anybody? Why should yours be sick and not the rest?"

"They're all sick; haven't you known? There's a drought, and the stock is dying of thirst. 'Tain't mine only; it's everybody's."

"Dying—of thirst. That is horrible, Maverick."

"Yes, when you know 'em, every one, an' have seen 'em born and lived with 'em day in and day out. The boys is all broke up. Hain't you noticed? They don't swear at the cattle so loud as they was used to. Cal, he ain't sung a hymn in—weeks. He's a'most reformed. The only man as ain't down is Toge. He's

makin' money, 'cause the boys drink so when they feel bad."

The woman soothed the boy, but she was thinking beyond him. How blind she had been to this universal suffering,—how selfish ! In her personal pain she had buried herself and had given no thought to these others.

She had accepted their protection, she had eaten their food, and she had laid not the lightest finger of comfort upon their burdens. Then she thought of her life ; of her Mexican mother, who, down in California, had taught her baby feet to step, and her childish body to sway to all the native dances. Her American father had come to them once or twice a year, but at last he had come no more. The deserted mother had pined and died, died so cruelly, and she, selling their few belongings, had drifted out to find her other parent. In Cheyenne her money had given out, and her one resource was the wonderful gift that was her mother's pride, and so she became the attraction of the Concert Hall. How it burned and stung her to dance there night after night to those drinking men ! Their applause, their leering, maudlin flatteries, lashed her to a rage that was like insanity. And the fire of her soul, stifled to speech, spent itself in motion. Who could tell that the undulations were the writhings of a soul in torture, that her genius was but the passionate voice of her pain. Then one fatal day she had found her father, the father whose image called back all the love of her ardent childhood. But Christopher Fielding had prospered ; he was rich and he was proud. If this daughter had come to him on a plane nearer his own, he might have proved less harsh, but to be claimed by the dancer of a variety hall,—it was intolerable. He thrust her

away with scorn, and in the first tumult of dismay she had snatched up the weapon she carried always for defence, and aiming blindly, had fired.

These were the memories that Miriam was living over as she rode with the little Maverick. What had become of her father? Her shot they feared was fatal, and she supposed it had been. She had dwelt on the thought so persistently that she could see in herself nothing but the criminal, the outlaw. The Maverick's story for the first time lifted her from her past. What right had she to sorrow with this living death about her? She who had suffered so, had she no hand of help for the suffering of others? In those bitter days of the Variety Hall, it had been her lot to turn men's thoughts, to divert, to engage, to amuse. As she looked out now over the silent riders, holding their places beside that stricken procession, she remembered her gift.

When next the men gathered for the evening, into their midst walked the woman they had seen that first eventful day. She wore her dress of crimson. Her throat was bare, and her arms, and the jewels that clasped them flashed in the lantern's glare and circled her as with rainbows of promise. And there on the heat-parched plain, in the grim, silent bivouac, she took up again the art that had made her name a talisman. But she danced now in love, not in the hate of the concert hall.

Her dance was not an artifice of steps; it was the utterance of a soul. Her motion was majestic, yet airy, the motion almost of a bird. Her body swayed to a music which she alone could hear; her eyes were filled with a light of subtle intoxication, and the languor pervading her was the dreamy sensuousness of the South.

But the uniqueness of her personality found its supreme expression in her arms and in her hands. They were living, speaking things, matchless, marvellous. And the men sitting around awoke from their depression. Their forlorn estate was forgot. They moved to the spell of the dancer, who had caught them away to rhythm, and art, and the magic dreams of youth. In this temporary oblivion they felt her sympathy, and silently they gave her back her lost crown of womanhood.

And Miriam herself,—herself, was there any self? Her sorrows had fallen from her; her past, with its unnatural sin, belonged to some being apart from her, some being to whose capabilities she could never revert.

In the weeks that followed she seemed like a woman new-born. She no longer sat alone and brooded, but passed among the men on small offices of button-sewing and of patching, and the tone of the camp rose from sullenness to a sort of resignation.

It was on the day that Miriam had taken again her attire of the dance hall that the stranger came to "cut out" Toge's band. Riding along they passed the prairie-schooner, and Toge to engage his companion told the story of the woman's coming among them. It was an ugly tale, this of shooting and evaded capture; it affected the stranger unpleasantly, and he brought the conversation back to the stock he had come to inspect. When he saw the condition of the cattle and appreciated the deception that had been practised upon him, he rode back storming with a rage that was defiant. And the kings, taking up his cause, entered their authoritative protest.

"'Twasn't a square show down," Gabe asserted;



"this man's a stranger to stock. Toge just ran him in on the deal."

"He didn't ask no questions," Toge said, obstinately.

But the kings, through Ange Drew, insisted upon justice.

"You've got to square it with the stranger," Ange said. "A trade's a trade, and it's all right that it's a sharp trade, but not if a man's been played. You've got to give back the money."

Then Toge in sudden rebellion turned on him.

"You give over yourself, Ange Drew, the money you've got off me. Here's half my custom gone by that Maverick, and not a feller payin' up. Jist you quit bullyin' and hand out."

The king winced.

"You know I can't."

"Then why'd you borrow?"

"I—had to. You were the only one that had come out of the drive with money, and this summer's been—well, you know what it's been. I'm trying to save the wreck. When I can't stand under any longer, I'll make over what's left for the loan. There'll be enough to set *you* up, anyway," he said, bitterly.

Toge laughed,—the grim laugh of a hard man. The drovers fell away from him, which made him harder.

"You're right you'll make the stock over, and we'll see who'll put up then for our lady's fine fancies, and——"

He did not finish.

There was a moment's ominous pause. That the devotion which the silent leader had concealed even from himself should be thrown out as an open taunt

into the camp was a form of brutality to which even the border was unaccustomed. Miriam, who had come in, had caught only the last of the interview. But she stepped into the midst of the group.

"If Ange Drew's brought trouble to himself for me—I—I couldn't stand it," she said. "I'll go back into the—the world, somewhere. I'll dance again in the halls. I'll get money. I'll pay you up, Toge; only trust me awhile, I'll pay you up sure. Ange Drew saved my life. He shall have all I can earn."

The leader made no reply. His face had a tension which the girl failed to interpret. Money! Money to him! But the king became aware of another man as absorbed as himself in the scene. This was the stranger who had come to cut out Toge's stock. His keen gray eyes were fixed upon Miriam in a sort of fascination. Whether it was the woman's bizarre attire,—for she had come out to her nightly performance,—or whether it was her peculiar personality, Drew could not conjecture. But the stranger's look betrayed repulsion as much as attraction. He was visibly of a more refined order than the cattlemen, and the king felt vaguely that a new factor had entered into the life of the dancer, and so into his own.

The coming of Miriam seemed to allay also the newcomer's anger. When again Gabe drew the discussion to Toge's trade, and to the justice of restitution, the victim was himself the one to surprise the kings.

"I reckon, after all," he said, "the fault was as much mine as anybody's. If I buy things without looking at them, I can't expect others to be studying my interests. I think Toge and I had better go off alone and fix up a compromise."

To which Toge replied,—

"I've never saw a case yet where citizens couldn't transact their own business a shade better'n other citizens could transact it for 'em. But other citizens have a rearin' good opinion of their jedgment in fixin' up corns, though their own do seem to have a sing'lar way of goin' to smatch. I reckon, Mr. Martin, you're about right."

The two withdrew, and the kings, with the commentary of a shrug, left them to work out the issue to their mutual satisfaction.

#### V.

A month had passed and the remnant of the column, that two years ago had started North over the Long Trail, after its toilsome, desperate drive, was at last dragging itself to—life. Yes, life! For up about the head-waters of the Missouri was grass,—grass, and water, and salvation. All the way from Colorado the route was marked by the whitening bones of cattle; here, those of full-grown stalwart steers; here, those of a calf new-born, to which the mother would call back—not many days. Soon by the way she, too, would fall, and the double hunger be over. Now there remained but a small band, gaunt and feeble, but every animal was even as a brother to the men who had watched beside them. And this remnant would be saved. From noon to-day the steers had been laying their noses to the ground, then raising their heads and bellowing feebly, breaking into a pitiful effort at speed, for they scented water afar. The burned, baked ground had given place to stretches of green, and the men drew a breath of gladness, for over the longest trail on record they had driven, and at last their drive was done. But the gladness that the

leader should have felt was far from him, because Miriam—yes, Miriam—it was all Miriam now to him. Only to-day he had overheard a conversation which had taken away all possibility of gladness. The conversation had been between Toge and his strange ally, the new arrival.

Through this month of his life here Abner Martin had come much into the dancer's company. At first he had sought her ; she was only to him the least uncongenial of a hard company. Presently her companionship passes from the negatively tolerable to the positively agreeable. The man had a furtive suspicion of the change, but its unwelcomeness blinded him to its reality. Still the suspicion of an interest was enough to decide him. Then it was that he opened negotiations with Toge to sell back the stock for a fraction of their cost. But somehow Martin vacillated. Away from Miriam, he was resolute enough ; in her presence, he seemed to weaken, and he lingered from day to day, dallying with a passion to whose dominance he only of the drive was deluded.

The wily Toge had fostered Martin's attachment with all his arts. This stranger, with his refinement and nice tastes, would not remain long a part of his coarse surroundings. If, at his going, he could take with him the second Maverick, Toge would have gained two ends,—the removal of the woman and the defeat of the king.

"There ain't a man of the drive," he had said that day, "that hain't in him somewhar's a soft spot over that Maverick. She's jist danced herself straight inter every fool's—well—commotionment. She's the most uncommon female I, leastwise, have ever come upon."

"They may have their 'soft spots,' " Martin rejoined, "but I notice they don't presume. She's reserved for all her cordiality. There isn't one here she has unbent to, unless it is to—to Ange Drew. She does seem to favor the king some."

"The king! You can count out the king. I'm about tired of his runnin' things. I've made up my mind to call him. He's proud, and I know what'll—well, jist you count out the king."

"Do you mean that he'll leave the drive?"

"I—I—reckon."

The look in Martin's face was certainly one of relief. He rose, as with a sudden purpose, but just as suddenly came that unmistakable revulsion. He seemed to shrink, almost to shudder. And the king, from his concealment, seeing the change, had his own conjecture. Martin had heard, probably, Miriam's story, and the thought of loving a woman who was, perhaps, a murderess, might well fill such a man with horror. But Ange Drew forgot the stranger soon in the face of his own catastrophe. Toge was going to close in upon his stock. He would be dispossessed, he would be beggared. This was the plan which the leader foresaw clearly, and which the next few days found carried into execution. So Drew had put the little Maverick's cattle in trust with Gabe, and the two were going back to Texas. Here the king was known, and here he could raise the stake necessary to begin life again. But though the lad accepted his friend's arrangements for himself, he was disconsolate over his separation from Miriam, and he voiced the thoughts which the elder had not found courage to express.

"We can't leave *her*, Ange. How can we? She's

used to we two ; she can't git along without'n us. Why, who'll fetch her in her meals, an' who'll ride in the wagon with her?"

"Yes," Ange said.

"An' who'll mend us up when we ain't got she? Who'll sit beside us when it's gittin' dark? We won't have no one to dance—why, we jist can't, can't—anything at all."

"Yes," the man repeated, rigidly.

"We must take her."

"We've no right to take her now. We have—nothing, Maverick."

"No more have she," the lad said, wonderingly. "No one's got nothing. I'll go and tell her we both want her, and ask her if she ain't comin' 'long."

"No, Maverick. Wait; I'll tell her. To-night I'll tell her. For your sake, perhaps—perhaps——"

But when to-night, after Miriam's dance had ended, Ange went in search of her, he found her sitting apart with Abner Martin, and he quietly withdrew.

## VI.

Abner Martin was trying to assure himself that his presence with the dancer here was fortuitous. When Toge had outlined his purpose, and the new-comer had seen that the king was to be forced out of rivalry, there had come that surge of pleasure which was the young man's awakening. He rose, and went out in dismay to wrestle with the demon of temptation. And he had conquered at last, and had grown strong to break away from the presence whose power he might not withstand. But he had lingered to watch to-night, for the last time, the dance. As his eyes followed the lines of the sway-

ing figure, they kindled to a fire that was ominous, and when, at the close, Miriam passed by him on her way to her own tent, it was almost automatically that he turned and went with her.

The darkness was settling down, the rich, fragrant night of early autumn. The girl, though tired, was in the strange, rapt mood that her dance evoked. Her bare throat rose and fell to her hurried pulses, her arms were curved to some thought half uttered, and the little slippered feet touched the earth with a lightness that was youth itself. The dusk enfolded her in its glamour. She was the living, palpitating presence of womanhood and of art.

The young man felt her charm like a subtle intoxication. But he struck it off, and turned to her with abrupt bluntness.

"I'm going to sell my stock to Toge," he said.  
"I'm going away."

"I rather thought you'd go soon," she said, musingly.  
"We're not the kind people like you stay long with." Then she realized the painful confession of her remark, and sought to divert it. "You're not a stockman, you know."

"No, I'm not a stockman."

"And you're rich, they say, so you've no need to tie to cattle."

"I came for other reasons; most of the outfit have."

A slight shiver passed through her at the personal reference. She hastened to change the conversation.

"Will you give up the cattle business for good? You spoke of stocking a ranch somewhere, didn't you?"

"Yes, I thought some of the ranch, but since I've been here——"

He caught himself back as from a statement that was escaping him.

"Ranch life is lonesome," Miriam ventured.

"If a man is alone, yes ; if he has the——"

Again he paused, as though at words that threatened betrayal.

"The boys'll be sorry you're going. They'll be sorry Toge gets back the stock. They don't like Toge."

"Will you be—sorry I'm going?"

The question was asked with a peculiar defiance, a defiance of himself rather than of her.

"I'm sorry when anybody goes," she said.

"Am I only—anybody?"

"No, not exactly anybody, of course. Each who goes is one less I am let do for. But you have never let me do for you."

"I want nothing from you,—nothing," he said, savagely.

She closed her eyes. She had no impulse of resentment or rebellion. Hers were, indeed, not the hands an honest man would have minister to him. Were they stained with the blood of death? Perhaps ; she could not tell. But she understood how guiltless lives must shrink from contact with hers.

"It is a frightful thing," she said, huskily, "to be—be cut off from your kind. I thank the men so much that they have let me work a little, just a little for them. They have let me feel that I was still—still—human."

The humility, the pity of it, moved the man like wine. He closed his hand upon her arm.

"Button sewing—patching, you gave them much."



The tone was hard, almost to brutality.

"I had nothing—nothing else to give."

"And you would give *me* that. I! I will have everything, understand, everything, for I—good God, I love you!"

Then he pushed her from him, harshly, viciously. But she stood so still, there in the twilight, that her stillness maddened him, and he caught her back as fiercely as he had thrust her away.

"I love you! do you hear? I love you!"

But the girl leaned to him, gently, soothingly, as she might have leaned to a child.

"No, you do not love me, Abner; you must not."

"Must not,—who knows that as I do? Love you? It is—infamy."

From Miriam's lips came a moan, low, tortured. She was to this man infamous; she was infamous, also, she supposed, to that other,—her leader, her king. His love, if it could exist, would be to him only shame. She threw herself down upon the ground, and, burying her face in her hands, wept silently. And her helplessness and her tears drew the man's last impulse of strength. He sank to her side, and wound his arms about her.

"I'm done fighting," he said. "It's all no use; I shall be a reproach, but—we will go away, darling, away alone,—up into the mountains,—up where the world cannot reach us. What do I care for the past? I will not care. I will not. We will be together. What is disgrace? what is man's judgment? There is but one life for me, and that is with you."

She could feel the fierce beating of his heart. But she recalled him across her own pain remorselessly.

"We could not go together. You forget what—what I am. I—shot a man."

But he put his hand upon her lips.

"I don't care—now. I want happiness. We will go ; we will marry ; we will love."

But she unclasped his arms and drew herself quietly away.

"You are very good to love me, so good to me, Abner ! But I would not wrong you. I will just stay on here with the drive. The little Maverick needs me, and perhaps in time——"

Then Martin interrupted her.

"The little Maverick is going back to Texas, he and Ange Drew. Your work for them is over."

For a moment there was a stillness, tense, painful. The girl's hand reached out in a blind groping, as though for a support. Her head reeled. But she drew herself together with effort.

"When do they—they go ?" she asked, unsteadily.

Toge will get to-morrow a replevin on Drew's cattle. After that there is nothing that he should stay for. His capital will be all wiped out, you know. He will have nothing."

"There is nothing that he should stay for," she repeated, mechanically,—“that he should stay for.”

She sat for some time in a sort of lethargy.

"His capital will all be wiped out," she muttered once, and "There is nothing that he should stay for."

But the violence of the shock began presently to pass off. She had grown through these months into capabilities of sacrifice, into habits of surrender, and gradually again she put behind her her own grief to consider the sorrow of another.

By and by she bent over to her companion, and asked a question.

"How much does Ange Drew owe Toge, Abner?"

"A trifle; only—five thousand or thereabouts. Why?"

"And when must it be paid?"

"Straightway, I suppose. Toge starts to-night for the settlement. In the morning he will be back with the papers."

She sat again in silence for a long time. Abner Martin was close beside her, so close that his arm touched the roundness of her shoulder, and he was happy. Presently the girl took his hand in both of hers.

"You love me, Abner, very—very much?"

"I love you beyond honor, beyond—beyond all a man should lay down life for."

"And you wish me to go away with you and marry you?"

There was a visible recoil, but he set his teeth.

"Yes," he said.

"Then I will go if you will give me the money to free Ange Drew's stock. He saved my life. I would like to make that small return for it."

And he replied, kissing the little hands that he imprisoned, "My love must use as she wishes what is her own."

Half an hour later Ange Drew's note had been quietly taken up, and Martin's stock—which, in its recovered value, Toge had been striving to buy back—was deeded by way of gift to the little Maverick. Then Miriam bade her lover good-night, and went out alone over beyond her tent.

The moon came slowly up across the far crest of the Rockies. It looked down fitfully on the sleeping cattle, on the mounted sentries pacing their slow circuit, on the group of men stretching their blankets for the night ; it rested lingeringly on the lonely figure that sat over against the hill-side. Some time later it lit dimly a man who crossed the intervening stretch and approached her. Miriam rose, for she recognized Ange Drew.

"I came out once before to find you," he began, awkwardly. "I wanted to see you.—It was business."

"Business——" she said. "Yes."

He hesitated. "Business" even is a thing hard to deliver one's self of at times.

"I've come out to tell you that the little Maverick and me—— You see, we've decided to pull up stakes here to-morrow. We're going to get back to Texas. We'll be wanting to start a new drove in the spring, and a man's better off where he's known."

She saw in the evasion how he shrank from revealing his fallen estate.

"I heard," she said, "that you were going."

"You did? Who told you,—Toge?"

A flush spread over his face.

"No. Abner Martin."

"Oh, Martin!"

"Yes ; he's going away, too."

Ange Drew looked at her fixedly.

"He's going away?—Why is he going?"

"Oh, he has no knack for cattle, and he's rich, you know. I reckon he is tired of this life. He's made the stock over to the little Maverick. He's going up into the mountains."

"The little Maverick thinks it mayn't be quite so—so comf'table for you, Miriam, when he's left. He's so used to riding with you and kind of looking after you. He thinks that you may be lonesome ; that you may miss him."

It was the Maverick, then, not the master, who was thinking of her in the separation. She could not disguise the quiver of the lips with which she said,—

"I should miss him—Bailey's boy—very much, if I was going to be here. I couldn't stay on here without—without him. But I'm going away, too."

He stepped forward with a fierce, guttural "No" of protest. But he stifled the word in his throat with the terrible self-mastery that she knew so well.

"You are going where?" he asked.

"With—Abner Martin."

The man turned away that his face might not be seen. She saw his hand close convulsively, then open, inert. His head sank forward ; his shoulders settled ; he seemed to lose height with his loss of force, and she knew at last that in spite of all things the king loved her. But his pride was kingly, too. When he spoke, there was only a lingering heaviness to reveal how the blow had told.

"You are—you are—you love him," he asked at last.

"I'm going to marry him. He loves me—but sometimes he hates me. I can see it. He cannot forget my—my past. He thinks I am unnatural. He remembers always—it—the man, you know—that I—shot. But it doesn't seem my past to me. I never meant to shoot. I didn't realize how the pressure of a finger could kill. I was thinking of my mother, of how she

called to him through those long days of her dying, of——”

“I neither think of that affair as yours,” Ange said. “Your soul couldn’t do it. Whatever your past was, you’ve climbed up atop of it.”

And she sank down slowly and knelt before him.

“My God, my God, you can say that to me!—I thought you—condemned me.”

He bent and rested his lips a moment on her head.

“Condemned you? You’re the woman I love. I came to-night, here—out here—to ask you if you could, —You see I’m poor now. My stock’s gone. I didn’t know as you could, or as I’d a right to ask you. But I’d be glad if you could be—my wife.”

She reached her hands up to him in passionate surrender. But only for an instant. Then the bent head lifted, the cowering figure straightened. She rose with a dignity that matched his pride, and standing there for one long moment they looked in each other’s eyes. Then she turned, and without a word, she passed him and walked back into her tent.

Presently Toge came in on some night errand, and Miriam, anxious that no animosity should remain, spoke to him.

“I’m going to-morrow, Toge,” she said. “I hope we can part friends.”

He came close to her. The malevolence in his face was undisguised now.

“So you’re going at last, be you? Which party be you going with?”

“With Abner Martin.”

As Toge withdrew, a light of sinister cunning gleamed

in his eyes. He went back to the bar and fell to stinging.

"He was in Helena last week," he muttered. "reckon he's thar yit. He ain't a man to lay down his record; that ain't his character. He'll come fi enough; and the rest—he can fix up the rest in Helen. She's robbed me of my trade; then she persuaded Martin into giving over the cattle to Bailey's boy. Now she's took up Ange Drew's note, so I don't git his stock neither. Well, it's half a night's ride, but I'm good for it."

A few minutes later, mounted upon his favorite mare, Toge was making for the settlement. Here he sent a telegram, and sat and waited for the day.

At noon of that same day, back in her tent, the dancer was gathering together her few belongings and making ready for her going. Beside her on a low camp-chair, Bailey's boy sat looking on with large, unhappy eyes. Presently, before the door two horses were led up, and Martin helped her into the saddle. The men came, some singly, some in groups, to shake her hand and wish her well, but Ange Drew was not of them. Congratulations and good wishes seemed somewhat of a mockery, however, where the accepted suitor wore so joyless a mien. The exhilarance, the defiant gladness of Martin's yesterday had passed, and a sombre melancholy possessed him. He waved his farewells abstractedly to the group, turned a moment as if in search of some one, then reining over beside Miriam, he rode with her from the camp.

The little Maverick went out behind the deserted tent and fell to sobbing, and the leader in a hope of solacing the lad brought out his own best rifle. For a time the

boy was diverted while he fell to polishing the weapon with the sleeve of his flannel shirt. But soon it was as shiny as the sleeve could make it, and between the listless strokes the little frame began to be shaken again. Then Ange Drew loaded the rifle for him, and tried to interest him in its use, but the desolation was too much, and the strong man, torn himself with emotion, fled from the grief that he was impotent to soothe.

Bailey's boy sat a long time alone. His head was bent, and his eyes rested hopelessly upon the ground. Then by chance he glanced out. Away in the distance he could see the two riders. They had followed the curve of the road and were now turning south. He remembered suddenly that the road curved here around the point of the hill. He jumped up with alert eagerness. If, with sufficient speed, he ran straight ahead, skirting the crest, he would come upon their flank. He would for a moment again be close to Miriam, he could say another good-by. She would smile to him and throw him a last kiss. He snatched up his new rifle and fled as for his life. When panting and exhausted he reached the end of the ridge, where he could see the road on either side, he looked anxiously beyond, fearing that he had failed and they had passed. But no riders were in sight. Then he turned to the camp road, and close beside him he beheld the two whom he had run so far to seek. But his child-mind could not understand their strange behavior.

Abner Martin had dismounted ; he was standing now close beside his companion, and she, resting her hand upon his shoulder, was dismounting, too. The girl seemed surprised, disturbed, but Martin's face was quiet, with the quiet of resignation.



The rock to which he led her was but a few rods from the little Maverick, and the conversation, though low, was clearly audible.

"Miriam," he said, "last night, when we were together, when I talked with you, I told you I cared for only one thing, my own happiness. That was true. Since, I have come to know that the world can't be for any *one*; that there's nothing but concerns at least two. I think I have grown able to think a little, just a little about you, Miriam."

"About me? You did think about me. You gave me money. You were my friend."

"Money—yes; but money is not happiness."

"Oh, it made me happy to get it—the money, and it will make me happy to—dance for you, and sew for you, and—you were so generous, you know."

"I wish I could feel that anything of mine would indeed make you happy. I could bear the rest then. But I love you, I think, to-day better than I did. I don't think all the best in me loved you yesterday. It does now in spite of—of it."

"Of my past, Abner?"

"Of our past."

"Our past?"

"Yes. I intended to go on, to just go on, and leave it buried, but—I must ask, I must know."

"Ask what, Abner?"

"Listen. There was a man, he was my idol. He was my inspiration as a boy; my companion as a youth. His life was the one clean, honorable thing in a town,—it was given over to excesses, to the excesses, you know, of a mining camp. One day he went into a concert hall. He wasn't a frequenter of concert halls, but there

was a dancer there that the place had gone mad over. This dancer began to dance, but she saw him and she stopped, and called to him in some foreign tongue that nobody understood. He came to her, she said something to him, no one knew what. They quarrelled, and in a moment, before any one could interfere, she had snatched up a revolver and fired."

"Oh, yes, yes ; I know," the girl said, desolately. "It was me."

"Yes, Miriam, it was you. They carried the man home. At first they thought he couldn't survive, for he was wounded seriously. I watched with him day and night. While this spectre of death hung over him, I thought of nothing but that I must lose him, that he must die ; this was my one great fear. But at last the doctor brought us word that the wound would not be mortal, that he would live."

"That he would live,—Abner, that he would live? My God, my God, tell me that again ! The man did not die? I am not a murderess?"

"The man did not die, Miriam."

She laughed aloud. Her laugh was full of a joy that was almost delirium. She wrung the man's hands. She rocked to and fro. Then she sprang up and snatched at him feverishly.

"Come, come ; let us go back. Let us go and tell Ange !"

"Ange,—it is not Ange, now. It is—the other."

"But there is no more about him—the other. He is alive. Oh, nothing will matter any more. I can bear anything, anything."

"There is more to me. Come, sit down here. You must listen. When I knew that the man would not die,

—when I could think of anything else,—I told you he was like—like God to me,—a great haunting horror seized me. Was this man a deception? was I nursing in my heart a being—well, like the rest? I would not believe it. But the thought was one of those treacherous, mocking things that will not down. I could not question him, I had loved him; there was but one besides,—that was you.”

Miriam was leaning to him deprecatingly. She did not speak.

“When I learned that the cattlemen had rescued you,” he went on, “and that you—well, that you were one of them, I bought Toge’s stock by way of blind and I came. I came to know just this,—that his life was still the upright thing I had believed.”

“But Abner, Abner, he lives. I did not kill him. Can’t you forget? I will try so hard,—you will some time forget.”

“Forget?—How you have made me forget! How you have drugged everything, honor, decency, everything! All I thought of, dreamed of, was love, love for the very woman who had shot him. It was horrible. I forgot him. I blotted him from the living. I had sunk myself to where—well, what right had I to ask if he was high or low? And did I care? I loved *you*. It was no longer what he was; it was now only what you were; what you were, Miriam, what you are.” He seized her hand violently. “Tell me, why did you shoot this man? What were you to my father?”

“Your father!” she gasped.

“Yes; Christopher Fielding was my father.”

“Then God pity us! He was my father too.”

A cry of mortal pain broke from the young man’s

lips. The knife that sundered him from faith and love at once, cut along his soul with all the acute anguish it would have drawn in flesh. He sank back upon his arm and lay there motionless. Miriam sat beside him in the same silence. And gradually his helplessness and his wrong touched in her the springs before which his love had been impotent. She bent down, and, drawing his head upon her breast, laid her hands about it protectingly.

"My brother," she said; "my own, own brother."

It was her first caress, and, looking up into her face, the young man saw in it the light he had striven vainly to awake. And through his dumb rebellion passed a quiver,—a faint herald of a distant, reconciling peace.

The little Maverick from his hiding-place in the rocks was trying to follow the speakers, to catch the meaning of this strange scene. But it was beyond his small understanding. While he was struggling with its mysteries he became alarmed, for, glancing around the outer curve of the road from which the point cut off the pair, he saw a body of horsemen. Riding out before the rest was a man,—surely the boy knew him. He looked close. It was Toge; and that other, he could never forget him. It was the sheriff who had come that first day to arrest Miriam. But before the boy could think, Toge had skirted the point and had come upon the two.

"So we've got you at last," he said, triumphantly. "You've been clever, but not so clever. There's a jury waitin' for you, Miriam, down to Cheyenne; they've been waitin' some time. The sheriff's come over from Helena to escort you down. Mr. Martin won't object, I hope, to having twelve good citizens to stand up at the weddin'."

No one saw the bright-polished rifle laid along the rock. No one saw the young eye that sighted. But at the flash, a cry rang out, keen, convulsed, and Toge, reeling in his saddle, fell heavily forward to the highway. Then a small form dashed past him, and the two knew who had been Toge's Nemesis. It was the work of a moment for Martin to lift Miriam in his arms and set her in her saddle. In her peril he rose out of self, and the "Sister" which he spoke had in it acceptance,—acceptance to which the old love would return after the tumult and the disappointment had passed away. Then he lifted Bailey's boy on to his own horse, and turned the two toward the camp.

"Take Miriam back, Maverick, to the king," he said. "She will never leave him again."

When the sheriff and his posse rode up to secure their prisoner, they found, instead, young Christopher Fielding bending over the body of the wounded Toge, and they went their way, feeling that such complications were more than they wished a second time to encounter.

The next year Ange Drew sold his stock and went again over the Long Trail. He took with him two companions ; they were the two Mavericks.

## A Transferred Town.

### I.

CHETICHI was of the early settlers. He was a lad when he came to Washington, and he had grown up true to his environment. When upon any errand he drifted into a neighboring town or journeyed to the far metropolis, no one troubled to inquire his name ; he was accosted instinctively as Chetichi. At home he was "Chet." His fellow-settlers yielded him the first right to the name, for he was less a personality than a composite embodiment. He seemed to accentuate every other man's virtues and vices so uniquely that they accepted him as the type, the animated temperament of the settlement.

Chet was a handsome fellow, though awkward. His uncouthness was natural, and had withal such an individuality that it sat upon him almost as a grace.

At the small general store where they dealt out groceries, dry goods, hardware, shoes, and such other commodities as the settlers could get on credit, there was a very nice gauge of character. They knew that Chet would buy potatoes because through the year he had been too indolent to raise them.

"Spuds do wear out hoes so," he would remark in justification.

They knew, too, that Chet would go without butter owing to the proclivities of just such farming material as he represented. He had planted grain ; grain would

"grow itself." Gradually he had started fruit-trees; now they were bearing, and fruit with its large adaptiveness threw a generous mantle of license over inertia. Chet was indolent, shiftless, aimless, torpid; he had sat here fifteen years waiting for the railroad.

When the first reports had gone abroad of an overland line, these men had come sanguine, trustful. They had their meed of energy, and they built their homes in faith, looking into the smiling face of prosperity. But the year had passed, and the next had passed, and the next, and the next, and still they sat isolated and alone. They were helpless now, for their petty "all" was linked to the destiny of the community. Ever and anon as the seasons went rumors rose afresh,—the road was coming, their vigil was not in vain. Then fitfully they hoped again. But continued disappointment wrought its work, and now the reviving rumors brought but a smile, the pitying, incredulous smile of the self-deceived.

"At first," Chet said, summing up the history of those years, "it seemed like we couldn't talk of anything but the road. We were so sure of it. We didn't see no wise how it could help coming. But talking didn't lay any rails. Each year we were certain it would come 'long the next. But we'd got fooled so often that at last we quit alluding to it. We'd come to allow privately to ourselves how's probably we were never going to have a town; we were always going to pull along 'bout as we were, and we gave over selling town lots in our mind. Then it was I laid out the fruit. Some of these citizens here laughed, saying I'd just get my trees in when along 'ud come the road, an' town lots wouldn't sell any higher, they judged, for the apples on 'em. These were the last comers; the others, they

set out some slips themselves. Now my trees are bearing this two year, and I haven't seen many engines pull into Chetichi yet. 'Twas only when I planted them trees and settled into knowing I'd never have nothing that I got back my spirits. I'd been discouraged for a twelvemonth before I come to planting, but from that hour I was the contentedest critter in all Washington."

This epitome, drawled out in the man's peculiar monotone, was given me in my first conversation with the settler. For the "contentedest critter in all Washington" he struck me as rather listless. He certainly did not reflect his condition actively, and I rallied him upon it.

"Well, to own the truth, latterly I haven't been up to my record. I don't know just what's got a grip on me," he said. He seemed puzzled. "I used to smoke all day long, and eat—well, no more'n I needed for a man of my heft, still fair, but now I can't seem to coax my appetite at all. My sleep's troubled, and I've wore out four knives a-whittling. I'm afeard the citizens'll notice I'm a-getting queer."

I wondered, as he remarked so innocently upon his condition, if he could be any queerer than his compatriots. Certainly the whole settlement had struck me as being quite the unique I had yet come upon.

It was mid-afternoon when for the first time I halted my horse on the outskirt of Chetichi and looked down its one public street. The sun threw its yellow glow steadfastly ; it heated the dusty road till it shimmered. It struck out red gleams from the angles of window-panes, and lit the sign at the end of the way to a burnished band of flame."



In the warm sand of the roadway four hens were nesting. Now and again one moved a wing or leg, but only to settle it deeper into her bed. Five dogs lay outstretched in patches of shifting shade, and a cow opened her eye long enough to assure herself of my harmlessness, gave a casual chew to her cud, and returned to her siesta. I learned later that these four chickens and one cow were the privileged residents of the place. This street had been appropriated by them upon their arrival, and the easy, indulgent population had left it to them as a back-yard ever since. It required some exertion to keep four hens upon their behavior, and Chetichi would have found it in its soul to ignore a crime, much less an offence, whose righting called for exertion.

I stood on the verge of the town and looked across it. What a bustling, active community this was! I had often been disposed to take issue with the poet and maintain that Cathay had its points. Now I had fallen upon Cathay and its points were unmistakable. My horse seemed suddenly incongruous. He might run, and who could tell what sort of cataclysm anything sudden might precipitate. So I tethered him in the shade and sauntered down afoot. I stepped carefully over the hens, who eyed me with tilted heads, walked around the bovine citizen, as became one to whom had not yet been given the freedom of the city, and avoided the dogs with the nice courtesy that is born of discretion. I passed seven door-ways. In each sat or leaned a man, and each man was asleep. With the man went inevitably the pipe. One had it laid beside him on the ground, a second had it on his knee, two slept with it in their mouths, drawing a whiff now and again across

their unconsciousness. But tobacco was the universal companion.

Every house was open and I glanced through them as I passed. Sometimes within I caught sight of women ; they were for the best part at work, some with dishes, some with brooms, most with children ; but wherever I saw a man, whether within or without, he had extended himself or propped himself, and was occupied with the one business of the town. The isolated settlement seemed forgotten of all the world, and with comfortable indifference it had dozed off and forgotten itself.

"How considerate it was in the Lord to make those men, men !" I mused. "If he had made them cattle, what would have become of the tobacco crop?" I smiled, too. "What a flood of happiness," I was thinking, "would fill the soul of the Eastern reformer, if she could only get her foot into this spot ! Think of the 'apostle of Progress' going rampant about Chetichi ! Oh, placid berg that dreams in the world's very noon-day, sleep, sleep ! The railroad must come, and on trains travel reforms, and reforms are gadflies,—that murder sleep. They are,—another man, and another pipe ! Is no one awake ? And I at the very end of the street ! Where the mischief am I to put up ? I shall have to shake this last citizen, I have no choice."

I was saved, however, from the rash need, for suddenly I was aware of a pair of eyes fixed upon me. They met me from such a strange quarter that I was startled. They did not confront me from the road, nor flank me from a window, they descended upon me from a roof. But the gaze was so placid that I doubted if I had impressed the man as a human being at all. If the cow had stood there in my stead, or one of the civic

chickens, he would have turned to them the same unreflective gaze. I was a moving object, that was all, and therefore liable to do something.

I felt it was simply fair that I *should* do something, if only for the man's courtesy in being awake. Besides, I was curious. That the only conscious man of Chetichi should be perched upon his roof gave him a higher importance than would attach to a citizen that met one on the ground. I turned to the door and reached my hand to knock. But the act struck me as rather ridiculous, since no one was within, and I had just exchanged observations with the proprietor upon the housetop. I was not hypercritical, yet to walk in with the landlord so visibly "not at home" seemed intrusive. I stood still and reflected.

In the door-way before me was a seat,—a section of log mounted upon three rural legs. I knew thereby that the proprietor had meant well to the general observance. He had retired duly to the front door for his slumber; he had not failed maliciously, but something had disturbed him,—I tried to imagine what,—and he had withdrawn from the threshold. So I ventured for the moment to appropriate the seat.

"The person knows I am in his house," I reasoned; "he will, therefore, come down and make himself available." But this was literally counting without my host. I sat for half an hour alone.

Every few minutes I could hear him shuffling a foot or so across the roof. I calculated his movements, and figured out that, at his present rate of sliding, it would take till noon of the morrow to cover the space. The situation was not exciting. I felt myself growing

listless; the general lethargy began to steal over me. The afternoon sun was hot and languorous, the dust was glowing in the street. I yawned once in a growing conviction of the demoralizing influence of Chetichi, opened my eyes hard, in resolute rebellion against supplying the eighth doorstep of this vagabond settlement, nodded in growing vacillation, and was off to the common unconsciousness.

When I awoke, I rose, and stretched myself. I looked about to see if any one had witnessed my lapse, and was glad that I was still alone. But I could not refrain from commenting upon my depraved behavior.

"This is certainly the most degenerating place I have ever struck," I announced. "I shall be a vagrant in a week. To appropriate another man's doorstep within an hour of my arrival. I feel like the very discoverer of this miserable custom."

## II.

Presently I crossed the room and went out into the yard. Here, leaning against the house, I found a very short ladder, and, climbing to its topmost round, I succeeded in gripping the eave and getting my head above the roof level.

This struck me as somewhat undignified for a first appearance. I should have liked to present myself at full length in my own proper person, but I must either vault into my host's presence with a suddenness that might be serious, or I must be content to appear as a decapitation, and I chose the latter. So I thrust my head up, and came face to face with the proprietor. He was smoking; he did not stop. He gazed at me composedly awhile, then accosted me in "Howdy?"

I was about to reply, "Very well, thank you," but I reflected that my "wellness" might reveal the fact that I had dozed a little, so I said instead,—

"Fairly, thank you, though somewhat tired."

"You slumped pretty soon," he observed.

"I—what?"

"Slumped. They all do slump, only some holds out longer'n some others. The last chap that jined the suttlemint now——"

He paused. I did not know whether he paused in deference to me or to the other chap. It was to neither. It was time to slide along, which he did, got himself comfortably located, and took up his remark again.

"The last chap that jined the suttlemint, he was two weeks slumpin', but he was oncommon."

"Indeed!" I ejaculated. I did not feel very com-  
plaisant. How was one to know that at his very entrance into this worthless community he was weighed in the balance of their treacherous customs?

"Do they all stay—slumped?" I inquired.

"Well—a'most. You see folks that come here, come generally on a new report 'bout the road. Each new rumor's bound to catch some dummed idiot or 'nother that ups and moves his family out to be in at the boom. He's always full of 'prospects,' and takes up his first days telling us over the same old stuff. But it don't last long. Most generally before the week's out he just settles down like the rest, and—slumps. There's a fresh yarn out 'bout the road, I hear. I s'pose that's what's fetched you now."

"Yes," I confessed, but hesitantly. "Yes, I'm the last 'dummed idiot.'" But I hastened to change the subject.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Doing?—this."

"And what is 'this'?"

"This?—it's these."

"Indeed!"

And really the man had justification, for he kept on doing it, and I could see for myself. The roof was covered with quarter sections of fruit, which he was turning over piece by piece. He turned slowly those that came within arm's length, then he cleared a space to which to transfer himself, and inverted those within the next radius.

"You are drying fruit?" I ventured.

"They're the best fruit in the country,—the Catlins uses 'em, and they say so," he replied, with satisfaction.

We were interrupted here by the sound of a voice. It came from under me, at the foot of the ladder. Some one had wakened, but his tone had still a slow drowsiness.

"You tell Chet, stranger, does he know whar's the Orwig saw?"

"Over to Campbell's," Chet called back.

"I've fetched home your shears."

"All right."

"We just borrow things here when we need them," Chet explained; "that saves buying. There's three axes in the suttlemint,—mine and Janson's and Handy's. I ain't seen mine for a month. I've got to go round by and by and get Handy's. I'll take back the Snow's wheelbarrow, too."

"I should think it would save time to own things."

"We haven't any need to save time," he said.

During the next half-hour five settlers had stood at the foot of my ladder, for whom, in turn, I located the vagrant possessions of the community. I began to feel very familiar with the ways here. To-morrow I would probably be going around myself. The customs of Chetichi were contagious, and I had now no petty delusions about my character.

As I watched Chet, I noted that constantly the man paused in his work and glanced furtively toward a large enclosure some distance out of town. In it stood a house different from those of the settlement. It was larger and more pretentious. Now, following his gaze, I saw where through the gate was passing a woman. She was followed by a man, and the two were moving toward the town.

My host began to be restless,—he turned the fruit mechanically, turning the same piece over and over, and then pausing stupidly to see which side should be left to the sun. I was weary hanging by the eaves, and, as the man moved to get up, I loosened my hold and descended. He followed me, and together we entered the house.

“Pretty quiet town, this, Chetichi,” I remarked.

“Think so?” he drawled. “Chetichi’s picked up considerable the last couple of years. There’s four new families moved here. They stay, you know, because they can’t get away.”

He spoke disjointedly. I saw his thought was not upon me, but upon the two who were approaching. I stepped to the window and studied them. The girl was young, eighteen, perhaps. Her face was gentle, but very plain. The white sunbonnet shading it gave a delicacy which was almost weakness. She was of a

social grade different from the settlers. That was evident in her dress, in her hands unmarked by labor, in her skin untanned by exposure. It was accentuated by the presence of the Chinaman, the only servant, probably, in Chetichi.

Chet had taken his place beside the door-post. As the girl approached, he addressed her.

"Good-day, Miss Norah."

"Good-day, Chet."

"Are you finding yourself pretty well?"

"Yes, thank you."

"You're wanting something to-day?"

There were long intervals between the remarks. Conversation was not easy between these two.

"It'll be pears this time," Norah said. "Pa's just bought the Rice land next our place. We'll have, I'm afraid, trees of our own next year."

"Yes? You won't have anything to come here for then."

He looked from the girl to the ground. He was disappointed. She saw it.

"That isn't till next year, though, and now we must have yours. Are they holding out well?"

"No; the crop was poor this year. I'm sorry."

"So am I."

"I won't be able, I'm afraid, to supply you much longer."

He spoke slower even than was his wont. It was the girl's turn now to study the ground.

"We must use less," she said; "that will make them last. I want them to last."

She crimsoned, but Chet was not keen,—he did not notice it.



"I want 'em to last, too," he said, simply.

"I'll take just half a basket to-day."

"The best are gone. The rest don't count for much."

"You raise the best fruit in the country, Chet. I never eat any fruit but yours."

And the great, uncouth man blushed and stammered, and was so visibly proud and happy that the girl could not help seeing it and blushing herself. It was a blissful moment, but awkward too, and, taking the basket, Chet led the way to the trees down in the yard behind the house.

They were gone a very long time, so long that, not being quite so simple natured as my host, I began to suspect a thing. When it takes a man three-quarters of an hour to pick half a basket of pears, something ails him. And when it takes a woman three-quarters of an hour to see him do it, she is fairly implicated, and that even making due allowance for the deliberateness of Chetichi. I began to realize what "affliction had got its grip" on Chet, why his appetite was unsteady and he had taken to whittling. But the man, I saw, had no suspicions. As the two came leisurely back, I scanned them closely. Although neither said anything, Chet's face was still flushed with the pleasure of Norah's praise, but Norah's face was quietly correct. The man was thinking, the shadow of future change was upon him, and he said,—

"Last year the crop held all winter, you remember. This summer's been dry; nothing has throve. The apples are, too, just as low as the pears, and——"

Then the Chinaman made a remark suddenly,—

"Bossee man say catchee apples at store. Missee

Norah say store apples bad. Wing say store apples bad. Good apples all samee Bossee Chet."

Chet looked at him with eyes that were almost alert. Then he turned to the young girl.

"Your father wants the fruit from the store?"

"Father is so old," she said, nervously. "He has whims. But no apples are so good as yours."

"'Twasn't the apples he objected to," Chet said with straight incision. "'Twasn't the apples, 'twas me. Ain't that so, Miss Norah?"

But she parried him.

"Father's so old, Chet. He's so—so different."

"Yes," he said. The tone was despondent, and yet rebellious. "He's different, and he don't want you to have anything to do with us settlers. That's it, ain't it, Norah?"

And the girl was truthful.

"Yes, Chet," she said, reluctantly.

There was a long silence. The man looked out across the river. His lips which wore before such easeful repose were compressed, and his eyes had a concentrativeness which hinted much. There was in this man a power; I felt it subtly. Would he remain always the placid, indolent ruminant he was to-day? I doubted it, seeing this sudden surge of change. But the girl turned to go.

"Will you want fruit to-morrow?" Chet asked, desperately.

"I don't know. I'll—I'll—try to."

Her eyes met Chet's and rested there,—only a moment, but I knew their simple story. How old it was! Here in this isolated settlement caste was as pitiless as by the storied Ganges, and here as there, love was lawless and brought its heritage of pain.

Chet walked to the house, and the girl, drawing her bonnet closer round her face, turned her steps homeward. But she paused presently, and, returning, handed the man a paper.

"It's the end of the month. Wing has the money. Here's the bill ; look it over and he will pay it."

She hurried away then, with her little white sunbonnet shading the heaviness of her gentle eyes. I felt the delicacy of her woman's soul which thus left finances to be adjusted between the men, and I liked her for it.

Chet held the paper listlessly and gazed after her. But the Celestial recalled him.

"Papee all light?" he asked.

The young man glanced over the rows of figures. I heard the click of coins in the servant's pocket.

"Yes, it's right," he said, indifferently.

"Countee up two time?"

"Once's 'nough. I've added it."

"All light. Heap good ; Wing say store apples bad, —velly bad. Wing catch money next time, next time, sure." And taking up his basket the Celestial hurriedly followed his mistress.

"Is that the way Chetichi does business?" I asked of my host.

He raised to me eyes in which the first resentment settles slowly into a quiet dignity.

"Don't you never tell," he said. "She thinks he pays. She's thought so for two years. Don't you never tell."

I had detected in the man a latent power ; now I was detecting a latent heroism. But I did not presume to remark upon it.

I hastened instead to inquire what accommodations

the place afforded for chance arrivals. But the outlook was not hopeful ; I was informed that it furnished none, for transients were too rare to enter into the reckonings of Chetichi.

"But," I insisted, "I've got to stay awhile. I must be taken in somewhere. Come, why can't I stay here? why can't I camp with you?"

He shook his head. I was disappointed, for hospitality is a universal virtue in the West.

"You won't let me?"

"I—can't."

"Can't—why not?"

He hesitated. "Not as I'd mind having you about," he said, simply. "You slumped uncommon sudden, and you haven't any airs, but I—I—can't."

Then I ventured upon a remark. The Chinaman's trickery gave the thought a warrant.

"Food supply giving out?" I asked.

He looked up with surprise. His simple mind seemed to wonder how I could have suspected the situation. But he was honest, and he said, reluctantly,—

"I can't get trusted any more at the store, you see, so there's only the fruit. I supply the Catlins. Norah says there ain't any fruit raised in the country like mine, and it is fine—what they get. I never touch that. I don't believe you could live on—on what I do."

I hesitated. I respected the man and his situation, so I ventured a compromise.

"I tell you," I said, "we'll run this establishment on a partnership. You supply the house, and I'll furnish the table."

He had a sort of pride, the fellow ; not the ordinary kind, a pride quite his own, and it took some time to

adjust matters. But at last he yielded, and the compromise was accepted.

My life with Chet became immediately a close and a genuine one. The absence of "airs" (which were naturally an abhorrence to such a settlement) commended me, and I alone of all the community knew to what bankruptcy and want the praise of a woman had brought my humble host, so I had a double license for the intimacy.

### III.

I had come myself to Chetichi as advance guard of the party sent out to make the final locations for the new Overland road. The construction force was in the field far to the East, and between the two marched that strange phalanx of speculators who are civilization's vanguard.

I was disguising my mission carefully, for there were still some concessions to be got, and concessions would be few when it was authentically known that the line was coming.

I contemplated Chetichi with the most complex interest. I was the last man who should look upon its primitiveness; who should know it as through these years it had been, a tattered, unkempt, graceless, amiable outcast, waiting for the touch of a commercial wand to change it to the prince it must become.

And Chet! this soul chained to its conditions, into whose life all unaware had crept the subtle power of love,—like the drop within the rock, would it rend its prison and fling the darkness off its struggling growth? Had that mind in the long torpor lost vigor,—would it stay dragging its leaden weight along the sluggard depths, or would it stretch brave arms of endeavor,

and rise on the waves of opportunity to—to Norah Catlin? Who could tell? On my lip lay the word that must toss all Chetichi into the coming whirlpool. I rose. The man from whom must come my first concession was Norah's father. I would saunter over there, transact my business, and note for myself what chance there was for my impecunious Chet.

I found the house very clean, very comfortable. The parlor had the green rep furniture that provincial taste still holds in high regard, the hair wreaths and wax flowers, the Bible and photograph album, the marble-top centre-table, and the tidies which had associated themselves with all the elegance these good people had ever known. Old Mr. Catlin was an autocrat, punctual always, rigorous with himself and, therefore, justly so with all the world; a man self-made and respectful of his maker. His daughter was the resultant in character of a heart strongly filial and a conscience painfully exact. Virtue stern and colorless was embodied in her father; she meant to obey him. But Chet, Chet handsome, unregenerate, he it was who through two long years had kept her harboring treason, and accepting her parent with a reserve. In puritan unsparingness she had faced the issue squarely,—

“Father's right and Chet's wrong, and caring for Chet, I care for the wrong, and it's sinful, and yet I do care for Chet.”

She had guarded her secret stealthily. But this night was destined to be eventful, and the event came incidentally.

I had finished my business, and expressed my thanks for the good man's concessions, and he was pressing upon me his hospitality.

"I hope you'll run up and see us often, Mr. Niles," he had said. "My daughter Norah here, she can sing some, and she can play no end of dance tunes on the piano. We'd like you'd come up to tea. I'm glad something occasionally brings a man to Chetichi that's different from the squatters."

"You don't like the squatters?" I asked.

"Like 'em? I hate 'em. I despise 'em. I was born poor, Mr. Niles. I've known hard times, but I worked. I never owed a dollar in my life. What I couldn't pay for, I went without. All my life people pointed to me. I was industrious, I was saving, I was honest. I owed no man a dollar, and now in my old age I'm rich. I wasn't a squatter; I bought this land. When the railroad comes, it'll fetch a million, a good round million, and my Norah'll have it. She's been my comfort always."

"I can suppose it," I said.

"I've always took pride in my family," the old man went on. "They've never lived like them drudges in the settlement. I worked for 'em like a man, and I kept them as women should be. My Norah,—I sent her a year to school down to Mill's Sem'nary. She plays the piano fine, and she sings; she's a lady, Norah. I hope you'll come and see Norah often," he said, pointedly.

"I shall be very glad to see Miss Norah," I replied. I was a little guarded. "When the road comes——"

"Do you know anything about the road?" he asked.

"In a general way—a few things," I said, evasively.

"No one seems to know anything definite. There was kind of a rumor started, but—it's the old scare, I guess. When it does come, I'll take my million and

my Norah and we'll go away—away to 'Frisco, where we'll never see again them lazy, worthless, no account——”

“But, father,” Norah interrupted, “they mightn't have been so no account if the road hadn't—hadn't failed so long.”

“Road! what's the road got to do with it?” he retorted. “I can sit and wait for a railroad; I've got money; but them shiftless, idle, smokin' beggars——”

“Oh, father!” she protested.

“Don't you say one word for them settlers, Norah Catlin,” he exclaimed, turning on her; “you're always trying to excuse them. I won't hear it. I despise them. They're just like lizards lying about in the sun. There's that Chet, now,—great big loafer! They've stopped his bill down to the store,—haven't had a cent in close onto two years, they told me. He's the most useless, most——”

“Father!” The pleading tone of her voice fell on his anger like drops of water on hot iron. He faced her. Suddenly into his eyes sprang a look of wonder, a sort of awed suspicion. When he spoke, the words came short, sharp, with the force of his excitement.

“Have you been down to Chet's to-day, Norah?”

“I—I told him we couldn't buy his fruit much longer,” she stammered.

“Longer! I told you to get it at the store to-day, to-morrow, always.”

He thought a moment. I felt vaguely that something was imminent. This inexorable man had set his hand, at last, on the throat of the young people's secret. I recalled with pain the timid nature of Norah.



"Stay here in the settin'-room," he said, crisply. "I want to see you."

I took my leave, feeling that the crisis was now a thing inevitable.

It was in the sunset that I wended my way back through the yellowing fields. In front the river crept, slowly, drowsily. The water was clear, and so low that I saw the shining pebbles of its bed. Over it spread the warmth and the glory of the evening. On the bank some boats lay, half in stream, half drawn upon the sand. The water turned from their keels with a murmur that was almost a sigh. In the river was reflected at once the past and the future of the people. When some time, in channels made of hands, this stream should pour itself along the thirsting land, in its wake should walk prosperity, but now,—now the past still lingered, and the water stared at the sunset and drifted idly down its quiet way.

I found Chet seated at his back door, smoking. I had told him that I was going upon business to Mr. Catlin's, and now, though he smoked stolidly, I saw that he drew the puffs deeper, and I knew that he was eager. The man was, in his emotions, as in his speech, lacking quite in the artificial, so I waited ; and not for long.

"Did you find old Catlin in?" he drawled, presently.

"Yes."

"Git what you went after?"

"Yes."

There was silence again.

"Did Norah say anything 'bout whether or no they were likely to be wanting more pears?" he asked at last.

"They won't want any more pears, Chet," I replied, quietly.

“Think not?”

“No.”

The puffs came more slowly after that. He sat motionless, except for the breathing and the smoking. At last he asked, so humbly,—

“She didn’t say, did she, how as they weren’t *good* pears?”

“No, Chet ; she said they were the best pears in the country.”

He drew a sigh of relief. His burden was more bearable. As he sat there, the sun went down, and over the evening sky crept the first faint herald of the night. He sighed again, and rising, leaned against the door. Here he had stood daily for two precious years, waiting the coming of that girl. He glanced across to her home. Then he started, and I, gazing also, saw where over the field two figures were moving. We knew them both,—Norah and her father. The man was old, old and feeble. He tottered and staggered, but some violence of feeling projected him forward with a precipitancy his failing limbs could not respond to. Twice he stumbled, but the young arms of his daughter caught him back. She was excited also, and seemed to be reasoning with him. She hung on his arm, she clasped it. She was entreating,—for what we could not know, but each motion, instinct with earnestness, told us that for some cause she strove to stay the obstinate feet beside her. As they reached the town, she seemed overcome with the futility of her effort. Her hands fell off from the arm they had imprisoned, she turned, and with reluctant footsteps took her way back ; but the man pressed on impetuously.

I knew trouble was coming and I stepped within. I

felt that Chet would wish to meet his guest alone. The minutes that remained were few. I saw old Catlin close at hand. He was talking to himself violently. He was gesticulating. His face was ashen ; it worked nervously. He came straight to Chet,—he was a fearless man,—dropped his stick, drew himself up, raised his arm, and, with a force that rage alone could lend, struck him a stinging, vicious blow between the eyes.

It was all so sudden, so unexpected, that Chet reeled ; but only for a moment. The next he had gained his feet, caught the arm of his assailant, and drawn back his own. The poise was someway terrible ; there was in it such sudden sense of power. The muscles were tense, the face set,—every line was masterful. Under the wrong of old Catlin's blow the man in Chet had leaped to consciousness. He felt dimly that to the other he had been but as the beast with no rights. Now he would strike his rights. His blow would speed with the force of an outraged manhood ; in it would speed death to the one that had disdained it. I turned sick with horror. But even as the blow struck out, it was caught back. Some voice, some impellant memory, had conquered impulse ; the figure unbent, the muscles relaxed, the hand wavered a moment, opened, then dropped to his side, aimless.

I knew the thought-flash that had saved old Catlin,—he was Norah's father. But the man was himself too blinded to read his foe aright.

"Coward !" he called. "You low, thievish coward ! That you'd dare ! You, you lazy, useless vagabond ! that you'd dare, you'd presume to, my daughter !"

Chet looked to him in complete confusion of amaze.

"I didn't; no, no, I didn't," he said, dazedly; "I couldn't."

"Liar!" The old man struck the epithet straight as he had the blow, but his victim made no movement of return.

"You've made love to her; you know it. Haven't I forbid her to come here? Hasn't she been coming steady just the same? You thieving villain! You haven't an honest bone in you. To ask her to marry *you!*"

Chet's surprise seemed to stun him. His words came stammered, gasped out brokenly.

"I didn't; no, I didn't. 'Fore God, I never did. I never told her I loved her. I couldn't. I never asked her to marry me. I swear it,—I never did."

The awfulness of the charge acted upon the man like a paralysis. That he loved Norah Catlin, that he would have the presumption to love her, was something his thought had never grasped. The scene bore in upon him only Mr. Catlin's resentment and his own charged assurance. There was a long pause. The two men stood in silence, looking into each other's faces. Chet's amaze and his solemn denial were slowly working conviction. The settler was innocent,—old Catlin was avowing it. But the avowal was bearing a fruitage that Chet could not understand. Slowly from the father's face the rage had died, and into it was creeping a sorrow, a humiliation that were profound.

"You never made love to her?" he said, at last. "You never asked my Norah to marry you?"

"No."

"On your word?"

"On my word."

Catlin's head fell forward upon his breast. He seemed suddenly feeble. He stooped, and with trembling hands took up his walking-stick again. His voice, as he spoke, was unsteady, and his words seemed heavy with their weight of emotion.

"And I've lived, I, old Rodney Catlin, to hear my child allow she's loved a man that was never in love with her. I've been saving; I've worked always. Now in my old age I'd thought—I'd thought my daughter would fetch honor; but, oh, Norah, Norah, that we should come to this!"

He turned; he seemed crushed, overcome. He did not lift his eyes, but like one stricken, he took the road that led from the town, and disappeared down the gathering darkness.

#### IV.

Chet remained beside the door-post. For the first time in his life he forgot to smoke; the pipe lay where it had fallen when old Catlin had struck his first blow. The perplexed expression of the man's face told with what mental wrestling he was trying to comprehend the situation. He had not mastered much of it, for he mumbled presently to himself,—

"I never did; it's God's truth, I never did."

"But you do love Norah Catlin, Chet," I said, quietly.

He looked up at me. There was in his eyes a furtive wonder that was almost fear. The old man's arraignment had been on the charge of presumption, mine was on a fact of sentiment. A half-hour passed, then he turned to me and observed with a solemnity of conviction that would have been amusing had it been less fateful,—

"Yes, yes, you're right. I do love her, Mr. Niles."

He said nothing more, nor did I. We sat through a long, unbroken silence. The night had fallen over us; the settlement was in darkness; but afar over the fields the rising moon struck dreamily across the portico of an isolated house. It dimly outlined the figure of a man. He, too, was sitting in solitude, and his old head was buried in his hands.

I rose finally, and, going within, lit the lamp. I had tossed my coat off when Chet called me. I went out and stood beside him.

"Didn't he say, Mr. Niles—do you remember him saying how's Norah had told him she loved me?"

"Yes."

"Didn't he say something about how I'd asked Norah to marry me and she was willing?"

"Yes, Chet."

"He allowed she said she would, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"All right."

"But you won't ask her," I said, decisively. "You're more of a man than that."

I expected to have my speech resented. I could have met resentment easier than the subtle shiver of hurt. It was some time before he replied.

"I—I think I understand, Mr. Niles. I'm too poor for her; that's what you mean. You're right. I am. It was knowing how poor I was that made me blind to what I was doing,—loving her. No, I'll never ask her,—not unless the railroad'd maybe chance along." There was a faint quickening of hope, but it died out soon. "The railroad won't come. I'm being a fool

again. It has never come, it never will come, and I'll never ask her whilst I'm poor. Her father hates poor folks."

"My friend," I said, plainly, "you are deceiving yourself. What makes you unworthy of Norah Catlin is not your poverty, but your character. If you were industrious you would have your own respect: then you could command the respect of others. No amount of money will ever raise you to the place Mr. Catlin holds. He made it, and he holds it by his honest manhood."

"You mean because he—worked?" he asked.

"Yes, because he worked. Because he tried to raise the plane of life for himself and those about him. No one lives to himself alone, or to his own time alone. We have learned that only through thousands upon thousands of years has man grown to what he is to-day. Lives by myriads have been sacrificed in the conflict through which he has dragged himself to a higher type. To live as you have lived is to set yourself against all the forces of progress. It is to render futile the struggles, the martyrdoms by which nature has raised the race. It is to sin against the immeasurable past. It is to mock the physical anguish of the brute, the mental and the moral anguish of untold generations of men whose forgotten conquests have built the brains as well as the conditions which are ours. It is to barter a race's——" I paused. I became ludicrously aware of the situation. Evolution and Chet were so oddly contradictory. My philosophy was about as accessible to his mind as my ethics to his life. I glanced up. His eyes were fixed upon my face; they were wondering, pained, and I grew certain then that,

in some measure at least, he had followed and comprehended me.

Soon he spoke. His voice was low, almost regretful.

"You mean it's wrong to—to slump—and—stay slumped?"

"That's what I said."

"I never thought of it that way,—like I was wronging anybody, Mr. Niles. I never lived anywhere but in Missouri and here. Every one a'most lived this way,—except the rich folks like Mr. Catlin, and there never was any work in Chetichi."

"There were other places."

"Move away—away from Chetichi? I've waited here fifteen years." The thought seemed to overwhelm him. "I—I couldn't move away,—I had to—to supply the Catlins."

I went into the house and got to bed. The day had brought to Chet much to which he must adjust himself. Its events had been to him a crisis, and the mental attitude that its issues should work out must determine his future. I retired and left him to himself.

I awoke late in the morning. Glancing out, I saw where on the same wooden seat Chet still sat. He had thought all night. His face was in profile before me. I studied it, and noted two changes. His mouth had lost the soft, easeful curve that had given it such a quaint childlikeness. It wore now the straighter line that had so impressed me when he drew back his arm to strike old Catlin. And his eyes had the fixed concentrativeness that had given me my first suspicion of possibilities. He would have been markedly less handsome were it not for the quiet air of gladness that played over him. And



I understood it when I heard him repeat scarcely above his breath,—

“She allowed to him that she loved me.”

After a while I tossed the blanket back and stretched myself. Chet saw me, and, rising, came straight in. I noted the change in his gait.

“Mr. Niles,” he said, with less slowness than I was used to, “I’m going away. I’m going to hunt a job. You put it very clear last night. I’ve thought it all out. I’ve thrown away twenty-six years. I tied to Chetichi; here was my land, and if ever the road did come, I’d have money. But you’re right about it. ’Tisn’t money that counts. Money is good, but a man don’t amount to much without character. I can’t ask Norah to marry me till she can—can respect me. I’m going away to make a man of myself.”

I was glad now that I had not followed my impulse last night and told Chet of the fortunes I came heralding to Chetichi. He had no vision of a coming change, and it was best.

“Chet,” I said, “I approve of your purpose fully in all but one feature. You must not go away.”

“Not go away? You said last night I’d ought to have gone before. I’m going to hunt work.”

“Yes, but before—before was—different,” I stammered.

“There’s no work here in Chetichi.”

“Yes—there will be—there is. I need a man myself. The work is hard, very hard, but you are strong: you wouldn’t want light work.”

“I don’t mind its being hard. But I was going to begin somewhere else,—somewheres besides Chetichi.”

“You are not going to flinch,” I said, smiling.

"You must make yourself a place here, among these men who have known you. You want the regard of your fellow-settlers and of all who are com——"

"Who are coming?" he interposed.

"Oh, later—a small party—some people I know," I said, evasively.

It took some minutes for this struggling soul to poise itself. I knew the conflict. There would probably never come to the man a duty sterner or more relentless than this of cutting away from the old and adopting the new in the face of his old companions. Therefore at the threshold I strove for it.

"Well," he said, at last, "I'd hoped to go away, but—but I expect I'll stay. I suppose you're right. I am a coward. Mr. Catlin said how I was, and I must be. But I'll stay and work for you. Only let me begin—straight off. It mayn't seem so hard when I've begun."

I went out into the yard and got Chet's axe, which by some unwonted chance had got back to its original owner.

"Here, we'll need this," I said.

"We couldn't nowise carry off the axe," he demurred. "There ain't but three in the settlement, and the Hayes' boys broke the handle off'n Handy's. They couldn't get along here. The suttlemint'd have to buy another."

I took the thing back dutifully, went to the store and got our equipment there, and together we set out. In the weeks that followed I was rewarded for my effort, for the one supreme desire in my companion's mind seemed to be to catch up with the twenty-six years that had escaped. Chet would always be a slow man,—alertness was foreign to his temperament, but his "staying

qualities" were remarkable. His unique charm, however, was his cheeriness, which I could understand, for often between the strokes of his swinging axe I caught a whisper, and it was ever the same,—

"She allowed to him that she loved me."

I had become now a regular visitor at the Catlins'. It was the only place in the settlement that could be called a home, and I had always the same pressure of invitation to "come round often and see Norah," accompanied by the same announcement of her accomplishments. "She can sing some and play no end of dance tunes on the piano."

But the gentle creature kindly refrained from entertaining me. She never spoke of Chet. At first my references to him seemed to confuse and pain her, but later she listened with a reserved dignity that I could not interpret. The man's love for her was so profound and so simple, it never occurred to me as possible that *she* could question it. But old Catlin had, I knew, carried from his interview a mistaken judgment. Still it was useless to hope for his favor till Norah's lover had proved himself worthier of her.

I managed always during my evenings to throw out enough facts to keep the household informed of Chet's advance, but I did so, as far as possible, incidentally.

"It's astonishing," I observed one night, "what endurance some men have. I have a man working for me now,—I've never known but two to equal him."

"Men grow to endurance," old Catlin observed; "they get used to doing a thing."

"No, this fellow wasn't used to work. He is a queer sort of chap. I stumbled onto him the first day I came to town and have lodged with him since. I thought he

had some good stuff in him, if one could only come at it. He can work longer hours than any man I know, except those two Maine brothers,—they used to be loggers ; but Chet—well, I don't know just where he got his muscle."

There was a dead silence and I speedily changed the theme. A month or so later a better opportunity came.

"They say in the settlement," old Catlin observed, "you've a party out in the field, Mr. Niles,—a party of engineers. Is it so?"

"Yes ; it's that—that government survey." I hoped the falsehood would not be charged up against me.—"I've had a party—it's not a full one—they've been out now three weeks."

"Indeed !"

"By the way, that fellow I spoke of once,—do you remember him?—Chet,—he was one of the squatters here,—I put him in as chainman, now he's got up to leveller. He's the best workman in the party. He'll forge ahead. That's the misery of a place like Chetichi : there's no chance in it."

The old man's brows contracted. I saw the anger mounting and I hastened to divert it.

"I sent to my sister, Miss Norah, for a new song that seems to be suddenly the rage. I will bring it over to you when it reaches me."

"She doesn't sing any latterly," her father said. "She hasn't been just quite herself for—for some little time back. She's lost her appetite ; she don't eat as she'd ought. I'd be glad the road would come. We'd sell out and move away."

I watched the girl narrowly. She tried to maintain

her cold composure, but her mouth quivered, and, making some idle pretext, she rose and left the room.

That was the last time I saw her till the great change had come.

## V.

The boom was on at Chetichi. The great news had spread. The Overland was located. Construction forces were in the field. The road was assured. All along the projected route towns sprang into being. The way was a moving column of wagons by day, by night a line of gleaming camp-fires. Settlers were coming by thousands; but the head of the file was led by the speculators, those keen, tireless "rustlers" who brought so much vigor to the West.

Chetichi had leaped from a squatter settlement to a town. No more in the door-ways did the old inhabitants sleep away the noontide; the old inhabitant was lost in the sudden throng. The civic hens and the urban cow had passed with him, and lived henceforth only in the fading memories of the few. There were streets now, flanked with solid rows of houses,—a work almost of magic. Two banks had opened and a full dozen of lodging-houses. The sidewalks echoed night and day to the tread of passing feet. Every corner held its knot of men discussing eagerly. Business was conducted in-doors and out of doors. The railroad; the rush of immigration it would bring; the great growth of Chetichi;—these were the factors that made the basis of every deal, and the town thrived on prospects. A post-office was under way and a court-house talked of. One church and twenty saloons divided the growing patronage till a theatre came and gave them a common camping-ground.

The outlying country, with a liberality truly Western, was taken into the corporate limits, and beyond stretched the reaches of the suburbs, all divided off by small square stakes that served the double purpose of marking the corners of prospective blocks and of giving a backing to the large white sign-boards which announced them "for sale." He would have been a stout pedestrian who would engage to walk the circuit of the laid-out city. Each man's faith in the future was proportioned to the distance of his land from the post-office, and if Chetichi thereby had town lots enough to meet the need of London, why, so much the better for Chetichi.

Every third citizen was a real-estater. Many of the early settlers had sold out. They had waited too long to take chances now, and the dealers had doubled and trippled the investments. Gambling was rife, not alone in the dens, but everywhere in the market place, and the one unfailing gaming stock was lots. The boom was on at Chetichi.

I watched eagerly to see the effect of the change upon Chet. To be projected between the two ends of an hour from the direst poverty to the possession of a quarter of a million might well tax a man's balance, and I was fearful.

"Don't sell, Chet," I counselled him. "Your land is in the very heart of the town. See those settlers that have sold; they've left the lion's share of the profits to the speculators. Land here is bound to rise for months to come. You hold till just before the road gets in. The future for years will be discounted in the values of this place. Dealers are going to get prices up, and the back country can't get settled so as to make

legitimate prices for a long time. Lots'll reach their highest just before the trains pull in. Sell then."

He looked at me calmly, drew the pipe from his mouth and observed,—

"I haven't any idea of selling."

But he did sell that very day a strip. He came in late in the afternoon and laid before me a receipted bill.

"I paid it, with interest," he said. It was the balance of the store account that since the day after my arrival he had devoted his wages to reducing.

"Chet," I said next day, "you are a landed aristocrat now; you will probably not want to work on as you are."

But he replied in words that left me no longer a question of his quality.

"That night you talked,—that night old Catlin came, I did a heap of thinking," he said, simply. "I've wanted since o'fen to go over and tell him how I was mistaken; how I do love Norah, and want to marry her. But I remembered what you said, 'You won't ask her, Chet. You're more of a man than that.' I've been more of a man, Mr. Niles, but it's taken a heap of grit. I knew I wasn't no way worthy to marry her. I'd got to get over being good for nothing. I am getting over it. And I'll get over it more. But there's one place I want,—I want it awful. I've thought and thought ever since I took on with the party. I'll never make an engineer; that needs book schooling, and it's all mixed up sums about three siding figers. I'll never get the hang of it. But I want you to teach me two things,—one's how to talk correcter, the other's how to keep accounts. There's a place on the road that takes just

two things,—accounts and character. I want that place."

I was puzzled a moment. I had never analyzed requirements so nicely. Suddenly I spoke.

"You want to be paymaster, Chet?"

"Yes."

My respect for the man's intellect rose ten degrees. If there was any one office that would give to Chet the stamp of official approval it was the paymastership. The post was one for which we picked our men with the nicest care, since the sums intrusted to them were large. The money was put into their guardianship at the next pay station. They carried it in the wagon which the master, his assistant, and two armed guards must defend with their lives. They rode through a stretch of country infested with Indians, and with more desperate whites. Only last month the wagon had been attacked, one guard killed, and the paymaster seriously wounded. Now we had a new man. As Chet had perceived, the paymastership would be his enrollment in the Legion of Honor.

"Well," I said, "it'll be a big leap for you, and it will take diplomacy, but I'll try for it."

"If I can get that place, Mr. Niles, I'll feel I've got some character, and I'll go then straight and ask Norah to marry me."

"But the new man—he's doing very well. I'm afraid——"

"He'll never hold it," Chet said, quietly. "I was out to camp yesterday when he paid off. The assistant sat at one end the table reading off the names and amounts, Chews, he sat at t'other end paying out. He'd his shooter 'long-side the pile and his knife 'long-



side the shooter. There was four fights a-going in the tent stiddy,—the men quarrelling over squaring up the small accounts they'd had along of each other through the month. Whenever two'd go at it, the crowd 'ud make a ring. Sometimes they'd join in, and more o' en they wouldn't. Chews, he had to quit the table six times to straighten out the place ; he isn't equal to it."

It was a cool, daring, resolute man, indeed, who would hold in check the fierce, lawless elements of the frontier. Looking into Chet's quiet face, I felt that we could afford to endorse his worth for all the fearless power he would bring to us.

"I'll teach you," I said.

"Thank you, Mr. Niles. Let's begin to-night."

## VI.

Old Mr. Catlin was now the chief personage of Chetichi. His field was rapidly growing in importance as in value. It had ceased to be suburban, and held its large place in the plat of the city proper. The man carried his dignity of "first citizen" imposingly, for he had a sense of righteous justice in his life. He had come to Chetichi in faith ; he had invested here all the capital for which through so many years he had toiled and saved ; now he was about to reap his abundant reward. He had fair warrant for his complacency. But his success had in it a few annoyances.

"I'm just pestered to death with those land-sharks," he remarked to me one night. "They're all after me to sell,—want to divide up my land into lots. There're more schemes made out of my old field than would run a dozen towns. But they won't get a foot, not a foot."

"I thought you planned to sell and move to 'Frisco," I replied.

"Well, so I did before the boom came, but things have changed considerably here. First place, the land hasn't got up to a million, and I said I'd go when I got a million. In the next place I hain't the cause to go I had then. Chetichi's got some folks now that people can associate with. 'Tisn't as it was in the old days. Chetichi'll be as big a place as 'Frisco in ten years."

"Think so?" I asked.

"I hain't lived here all this time studying for nothing. Look at that Chetichi Valley,—it'll be irrigated now shortly. The road'll bring in money, and the money'll develop the back country. I tell you, Chetichi is bound to be a city."

"I wouldn't reckon on it too much," I said, cautiously. "I'd sell before the road got in."

"Sell!" He laughed disdainfully. "I thought you'd got nerve. If there wasn't any more faith in the town than you've got, where'd lots be? Chetichi'll hold her pace. This isn't a boom, it's good, natural, healthy growth. When the valley gets water, there won't be its equal anywhere. The land'll grow anything."

"But it takes a quantity of money to irrigate and——"

"And isn't Eastern money just pouring in here like water? Folks ain't blind,—they see the chance. I've a scheme myself for tapping the river. By and by, next summer——"

He was interrupted here by the entrance of guests. He had no complaint to offer now for the social sterility of the town. Norah was the heiress of Chetichi, and

Mr. Catlin was both old and decrepit. She had suitors galore, and her father was ludicrously proud of her popularity. I was no longer pressed to "come round often and see Norah." I was one of many, but I came nevertheless, for I was beginning to be uneasy over the outlook. The girl had one suitor whom I feared,—Ramsey Ives. He was a versatile fellow, brought up in a household of sisters, and apt in all pretty deferences. He had been a small artist back in New Hampshire, and, getting together a few hundred dollars, had come to double it up in speculation in the West. He had now the partisanship of old Catlin, and it began to look as though he would be the winning suitor. So I thought it best to advise Chet.

"The Catlins are doing a good deal of entertaining these days," I ventured.

"Yes?" he said. "Well, they've big prospects and nothing to do. The old man must be getting kind of helpless, and I suppose he enjoys having folks run in and talk awhile. It helps kill time."

"I don't know as they come—all—to see the old man."

"No?"

He pondered awhile, then looking at me straightly.

"You're mistaken, Mr. Niles," he said. "You don't know Norah. She allowed she loved me and she does."

"But you haven't seen her since—since that night."

"I know. I couldn't see her without telling her—things. And—and I didn't want to tell her—things—till I'd worked; till I'd made out to get some character."

"I think, Chet, you'd better not wait too long."

But there was a doggedness of faith in the man. I saw I had roused no jealousy and no quickening of alarm, and I said,—

“She must be tired waiting for you now so long.”

“Well, sure enough, so she might.” He was smiling, dreamily. “It’s years and years like to me, it’s most probably the same to her. Mr. Niles, there’s just one turn more you can do for me. Go to Chews. He’s sticking most onreasonably. He hasn’t played fair. He’s taken on that bull pup,—’taint been square. Go to him and offer him anything—anything,—money don’t count now,—tell him he’s got to resign. I can’t wait any longer. I’ve just got to be paymaster.”

That afternoon there was a transfer of real estate,—Chews had resigned. Two hours later it was officially announced that Chet had been assigned the vacant post.

It was towards eleven next morning that, dressed in his latest suit (the duplicate of mine), Chet went up to test his fate.

It was too early yet for the guests who had become now regular attendants. Norah and her father sat alone in the family sitting-room. The town was not a place of formalities. Chet did not send his name, but, following Wing, he was ushered unannounced into the presence of the two. It was the first time that he had stood in this house, this house which had represented to him so long all the grandeur of dreams. For the moment his old diffidence came back, and he stood holding his hat in his hand, a picture of bashful awkwardness. Old Catlin rose, and seeing his visitor, accosted him sharply,—

“Well, sir, and what do you want?”

The words, the tone,—they struck as had the blow long months before. They stung their victim to the same violence of resentment. He was no longer awkward. His voice, when he spoke, was slow but self-assured.

“What do I want? I want your daughter. I love her; I’ve always loved her. She loves me; she allowed she did. I want her.”

Old Catlin heard the demand with something akin to dismay. This was not the Chet he had known. This was a creature of perilous metal. He shrank before the man’s suppressed force, and turned it with a taunt,—

“Yes? And since when have you found out you want her? Since the boom came! She’s the richest girl in Chetichi now and——”

But he did not finish. There was a wicked fire in Chet’s eyes. One step brought him close beside his tormentor. But as quickly Norah had stretched a barring hand between them.

“Don’t! Don’t you!” she commanded.

“Do you say it, too?” Chet asked, fiercely. “Do you say how’s it’s your money I’m after?”

“No,” she answered.

“Do you allow that I love you square?”

“I—I think so.”

“Didn’t you tell your father that you loved me?”

“She don’t love you,” the old man struck in viciously. “We don’t want you; we don’t want anything to do with you.”

“Norah,” Chet said, addressing her. “I’ve done lots that I regret. When you said you loved me, I took a new grip and started in to work. I’ve been making a man of myself, and I’ve climbed up till I’m

paymaster. I came here to-day to tell you—things. Is his word so? Is it all up between us?"

She looked from one to the other in perplexed pain. But her lover was relentless.

"Is it so, or is it not?"

"Chet," she said, under her breath, "I do love you."

"And you'll marry me?"

But her father interposed. In his extremity he forsook command.

"Norah," he said, "there ain't many wishes more I can have for you. I haven't long to stay,—not long. You've been all I've had since—since your mother went. My claim to you is first, don't you think so?" And she did not hesitate. She left Chet, and going, knelt beside his chair.

"I have never thought of leaving you, father. I will always stay with you. I love Chet. I'm sorry, but——"

"You will marry him, Norah?"

She looked to her lover. In her eyes was a weight of sadness, but there was no wavering.

"Not till you consent," she said. He stroked her hair approvingly, and Chet, coming to where she knelt, reached his hand to her.

"Good-by, Norah," he said, very quietly, and she replied only, "Good-by." And so they parted.

On his way through the town Chet came upon Ramsey Ives, who was standing in the door of a restaurant. Last week Ives had sought him. As agent of a real estate syndicate he had made a bid for Chet's block. Events at the Catlins' had changed the man's purposes; he stepped across.

"You fellows can have that block," he said. "The

price is low and I didn't mean to sell, but—but you can have it."

They turned and went in together. Something had happened to Chet, that was revealed to Ives at a glance, and it needed no great penetration to determine what. He had come from the direction of the Catlins', he was selling out; the shrewd mind of the dealer saw at once that his life chance had come. He would drive a hard bargain. He would "bear" the land to the lowest, and the margin of gain he would pocket. It was only fair, since the stake was made by his own clever manipulation of another's extremity. And he succeeded beyond his hope. Chet was truly indifferent now. He wished only to rend the last fetter that bound him to the place, and under Ives's artful pressure he dropped and dropped till when the deal closed the agent had the satisfaction of knowing that twenty thousand dollars were his perquisites of his rival's rejection.

Chet felt vaguely that Ives had outwitted him. But he was moving as in a haze. The blow that had been dealt him at the Catlins' left him still mentally stunned. He walked slowly to the bank, drew part of the syndicate check and deposited the balance to his credit. Then he took his way back to his home. He went into the yard, moved the low log seat, set it in the old-time place against the side of the house, lit his pipe and sat down.

The afternoon sun poured its warmth over him. He felt drowsy, almost torpid. By and by its beams began to shift. They were throwing slanting shadows now among the trees yonder in the orchard. He would never go down there again with her. He would never see her sweet face turned to him under the

branches. And those shadows were creeping up, creeping up. Soon the sun would set, and the darkness would shut from him this last memory of her. Dimly in upon his silence was borne a murmur from the street. It was growing to a commotion. But he gave it no heed. What were the doings of men to him? The sun had gone down. The trees that his eyes sought hungrily were passing into gloom. He was alone, alone forever.

Here I found him on my entrance for the night. As I glanced out I noticed what a change this hour had wrought. The gladness that used to play over his expression had gone, leaving the face plain, hard. He had lost his erectness and sat stooped as though he had grown suddenly old. He was looking out over the river, but he did not seem to be thinking; his expression was one of dull blankness.

And this was the man to whom I must carry the story of Chetichi's tragedy. It had reached the street. It was passing from mouth to mouth. We could hear the rapid tread of hurrying feet. Men were gathering on the corners, in saloons, everywhere discussing the common disaster.

"Chet," I said, going out and standing beside him, "can you bear a great trouble?"

"I am bearing it—well's I can. He wouldn't have it, you know, and she, she couldn't go against him. He's old and he's her father. I couldn't blame her any; she's done what she thinks is right, but—but——"

"It isn't that trouble, it's a new one, much, much worse, Chet."

"No," he replied quietly, "'t isn't worse."

Chet had been a manly fellow. I realized that, as he



said, other losses would really be slight before this supreme defeat that had taken all the purpose from his life.

"The order has come through from New York," I began, "changing the terminal from Chetichi to four miles up the line. This is in the company section, the land belongs all to the road. They will build a town of their own. No more trains will stop here. It will—blot—out—Chetichi."

The man looked fixedly in my face, then out across the stream. For five long, silent minutes he sat so. Then he turned to me. He had grasped the full significance, he saw the end. But he did not rise, and his voice, as he spoke, was strangely composed.

"We're shut out,—left. Everything's got to move. They've broke the town."

"Yes, Chet," I said, "Chetichi is ruined. It's the Land Department that's at the bottom of it. And we are powerless."

"It'll wipe values off everything. I was going away myself anyhow, and——"

"But old Catlin——" I said.

I had scarcely uttered the name when the door was thrown violently open, and passing through the house, Wing stood before us. He was breathless with haste and with excitement.

"Bossee Chet, Missee Nolah wants Bossee Chet. Ole bossee heap sick. Fall down. No gettee up. Missee Nolah say come light off, quick."

Chet was out of the door at the first word, and, snatching up my hat, I hastened after him. This blow—it might well prove a fatal one to the proud old veteran. Where was his million to-night?—wiped out at the word of a man whom he had never known.

We found him in a state that left no hope. The young might overlive the shock of this catastrophe, Rodney Catlin it had crushed. He had come out of his convulsion and lay upon the bed. He was weak, spent, and his talk had only one theme.

"Beggared,—beggared, and me so old! Beggared! And I worked and worked all my life. I never spent like some; I saved it all. And I had a million, all for Norah, and now we've got nothing. And I'll die and leave her—with nothing, nothing."

"Wouldn't you let me—work for her, Mr. Catlin?" Chet said. He bent over the bed, and his voice was hoarse. "I'll love her like you've loved her, and I'll work—I'll work for her just as you've worked."

The old man looked up. He was a pitiful wreck of the autocrat who had triumphed in the morning. His greeting was gentle now and his words reflected the weight of his defeat. "That you, Chet?" he said. "I was kind of hard on you to-day. You see I was very rich, and I wanted Norah to marry high. But we've lost everything."

"I'm sorry," Chet said.

"They've robbed me. They've moved the terminal. They've shut out Chetichi."

"The railroad made the town, Mr. Catlin; it has undone it. We've got to move. But I'm paymaster, you know. I can work now. Only give me Norah. We'll begin life all together in the new town."

"I'll never see the new town," he said, faintly. "I couldn't start again, I'm too old. I worked all my life. I can't work any longer. Norah, I've been hard on Chet. Maybe I've been hard on you, too. I said I'd never consent to your taking him. But I haven't long

to stay. They've killed Chetichi, and they have killed me. Do you want him, daughter?"

Chet put his arm protectingly about her. Across her tears she looked into his face.

"Yes, father," she answered.

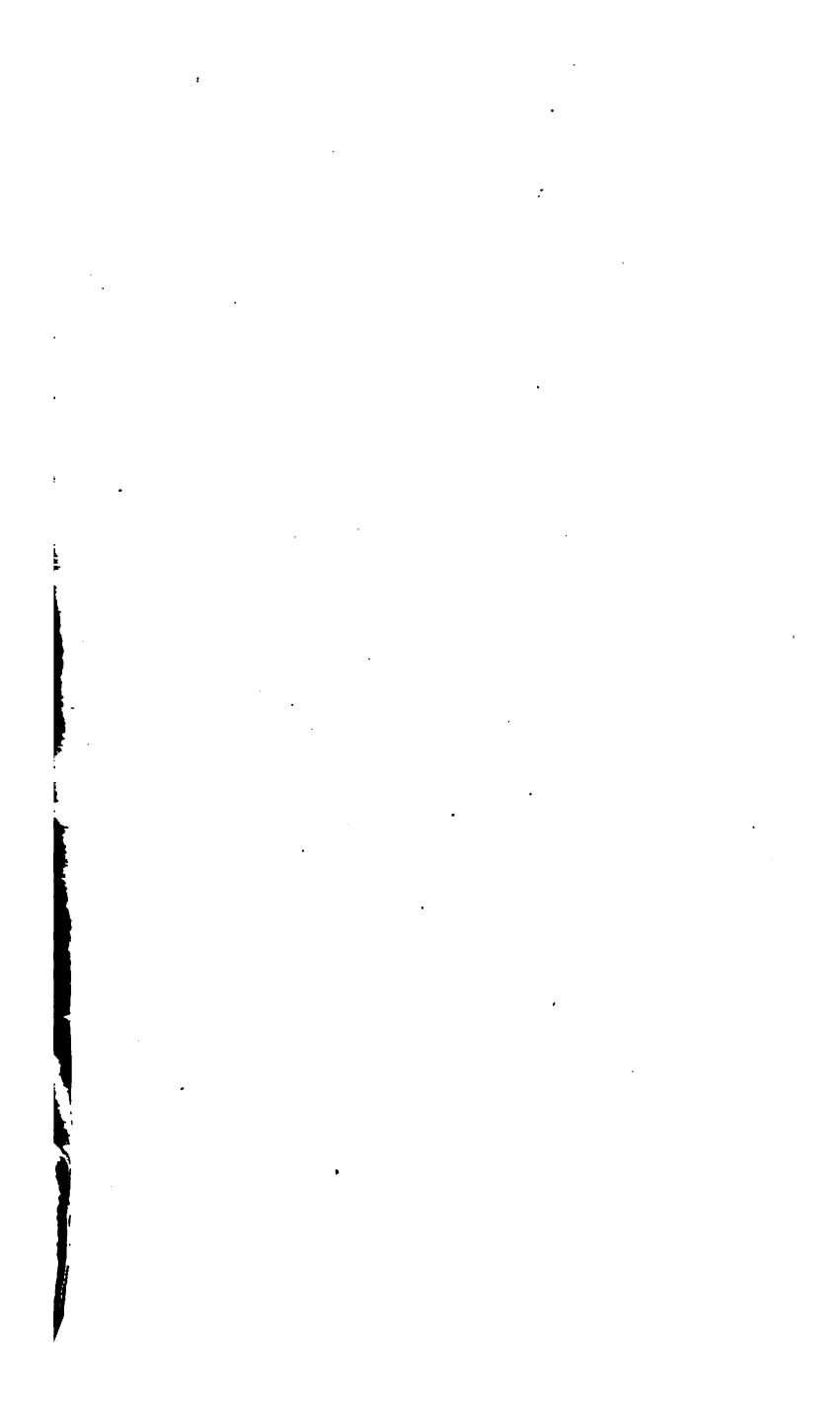
"Well—well, child. You'll be poor, but——"

Then Chet said very quietly,—

"She will not be poor, Mr. Catlin. I sold to the syndicate this morning."

THE END.

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JL







15





